



# Durham E-Theses

---

## *Pulling focus: New perspectives on the work of Gabriel Figueroa*

Higgins, Ceridwen Rhiannon

### How to cite:

---

Higgins, Ceridwen Rhiannon (2007) *Pulling focus: New perspectives on the work of Gabriel Figueroa*, Durham theses, Durham University. Available at Durham E-Theses Online: <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/2579/>

### Use policy

---

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a [link](#) is made to the metadata record in Durham E-Theses
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Please consult the [full Durham E-Theses policy](#) for further details.

Pulling Focus: New Perspectives on the Work of Gabriel Figueroa

by

Ceridwen Rhiannon Higgins

University of Durham

2007

Submitted for Examination for Degree of PhD



11 JUN 2007

## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the work of Mexican cinematographer Gabriel Figueroa (1907-1997) and suggests new critical perspectives on his films and the contexts within which they were made.

Despite intense debate over a number of years, auteurist notions in film studies persist and critical attention continues to centre on the director as the sole giver of meaning to a film. Consequently, scholars and critics have overlooked the cinematographer's contribution. The small amount of work that exists on Figueroa, in keeping with studies on other cinematographers, is biographical and anecdotal, concentrating on his personal life rather than his contribution to Mexican cinema. Therefore, this thesis proposes a critical evaluation of Figueroa's cinematography and advocates new analytical paradigms to examine his work. The study constructs its arguments from close visual analysis of Figueroa's films, his unpublished autobiographical writings, letters and related documents within the theoretical and critical contexts of film and Mexican cultural studies.

From an overview of how scholars have neglected cinematography in the past, the thesis deconstructs widespread assumptions that relate Figueroa to notions of the national and focuses attention on the inherent transnational economic, political and ideological relationships that informed his images. Through close analysis of eight films I will examine how Figueroa expressed such transnational contexts in relation to: sound in the nascent Mexican industry, race and class in the rural space, urban modernity and the role of the mother and Figueroa's visual critique of the Mexican bourgeoisie.

To pull focus shifts attention from one object in the frame to another. This study shifts critical focus onto Figueroa's contribution to the Mexican and international film industries. In so doing, it offers new analytical standpoints from which to evaluate not only Figueroa as a giver of meaning within Mexican cinema, but to also suggest alternative critical positions from which to view cinematography and its complex ties to, and expression of, a film's political, economic and ideological contexts.

## Acknowledgements

With grateful thanks to Andrea Noble for her help and guidance. My research and thinking behind this thesis would not have been possible without the generous contribution and support of Gabriel Figueroa Flores. Many thanks to Celia Barrientos and Ivan Trujillo for providing the best prints and private screenings at the Filmoteca de la UNAM during the period 1998-1999, together with the *cacaros* of the Sala Fósforo in San Idelfonso who provided useful insights into the films. A special thanks to Michael Stevenson whose enthusiasm and steady encouragement gave me the confidence to finish this project.

My thanks to Helen for her friendship and intellectual brilliance, Anne for her threats to get me into the boxing ring with her if I didn't finish the thesis, Babs and Bezzers the steam team and El Gato Moby for his cosy company on some very dark days.

Finally, my love and endless gratitude to Rata Sucia and El Pollo for their unfailing support, love and hugs – this study is as much their work as mine.

The thesis is dedicated to:

Mum (1922-2004), Dad (1920-2007) Carol (1954-2004) and Mariana (1925-2002)



## Contents

<i>Abstract</i>	2
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	4
<i>Introduction</i>	5
<i>Chapter 1</i> Cinematography and Cinematographers	30
<i>Chapter 2</i> Inventing Mexico: Going Beyond the 'Fernández-Figueroa Style'	54
<i>Chapter 3</i> Composing Transnationalism: Visual Style and Song in <i>Allá en el Rancho Grande</i>	93
<i>Chapter 4</i> Figueroa and the Rural Space	122
<i>Chapter 5</i> Figueroa's City	161
<i>Chapter 6</i> Exterminating Visions: The Collaboration of Figueroa and Luis Buñuel	189
<i>Concluding Remarks</i>	220
<i>Bibliography</i>	227
<i>Appendix i</i> Filmography	249
<i>Appendix ii</i> Synopses of films discussed in thesis	276
<i>Appendix iii</i> Figueroa's awards	291
<i>Appendix iv</i> Glossary of technical terms	298
Index of DVD clips	308
DVD of sequences analysed in thesis	

## Introduction

Figueroa ha sido no solo sinónimo del cine mexicano sino de México.

(Tomás Pérez Turrent, 1997a)

Cinematographer Gabriel Figueroa (1907-1997) is widely recognised as one of the founding fathers of Mexican cinema and has come to occupy a privileged position in the national cultural pantheon. Given the auteurist inclinations of much film scholarship, with its focus on the director's creative input into the making of the moving image, this is, to say the least, unusual. Scholars have tended to overlook the collaborative nature of creative filmmaking and whilst they might praise the visual quality of a film, it is rare that they grant the cinematographer more than a brief mention. Even the few figures in the industry with a similar status to Figueroa, such as Gregg Toland (US), Sven Nikqvist (Sweden), Vittorio Storaro (Italy), Freddie Young and Jack Cardiff (UK), have not received the critical and popular recognition in their native countries to compare with the celebrity that Figueroa has sustained in Mexico. More importantly, and central to this study, neither have these cinematographers' images played such a major part in the formation of their respective national imaginaries in the way that those of Figueroa have done.

Numerous books, television programmes, journal articles and magazines, dedicated to Figueroa and his work, demonstrate the popular esteem in which the man and his contribution to cinematography are held. In November 2005, this status was reconfirmed with the publication of an edited edition of his memoirs (Soler Frost 2005).<sup>1</sup> Retrospectives of his work take place regularly at home and abroad and exhibitions of stills taken from his light tests are organised.<sup>2</sup> Reproductions of his images hang in cantinas and shops reverentially named *Café Enamorada*, *Restaurant María Candelaria* and *Abarrotes La Perla*. Throughout his career, Figueroa received numerous accolades, nationally and internationally and in 2007 there are plans to celebrate his centenary.<sup>3</sup> In short, both Figueroa and the images he created

have been central to Mexican culture and society for over sixty years. They are icons of the national cinema and as Pérez Turrent suggests, have become synonymous with Mexico itself in the popular imagination.

The aim of this study is to 'pull focus' on Figueroa's work to suggest reasons why his images have acquired such iconic status. The intention is not to situate Figueroa as a substitute auteur, but rather to critically recognise that film production is inherently collaborative and, in so doing, acknowledge the close creative partnership between the cinematographer and the director in the production of meaning in a film. On close examination of Figueroa's work, fissures appear between the images and the themes of the films which compromise the post-revolutionary nationalism that scholars have uncritically assumed they embody. On further investigation, these contradictions reveal a complex set of transnationalist influences and contexts which are present, not only in Figueroa's work, but also within the Mexican film industry itself.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Pérez Turrent's suggestion that Figueroa 'is Mexico' transforms into a conundrum. Is Figueroa Mexico? Is Mexico Figueroa's? If the cinematographer is associated with the Mexico he created, what is that Mexico, how did he produce it and why? Furthermore, despite the constant acknowledgement of the importance of his work, it is significant that, to date, there has been little in-depth critical analysis of the images that investigates this cultural puzzle. Nor, indeed, have the reasons as to why Figueroa is so central to the cinematic and cultural pantheon of Mexico been explored. How and why has his work become so integral to visual constructions of national identity?

The beauty of the images and the charismatic personality that produced them subtly seduce and it is easy to fall under their spell. Much of the work on Figueroa has been anecdotal and biographical. For example, Elena Poniatowska's book *La mirada que limpia* (1996) juxtaposes interviews between the author and Figueroa, his wife Antonieta, his son Gabriel and his daughters María and Tolita. Poniatowska centres her questions on personal

details and the family's subjective views of Figueroa to produce an intimate portrait of the man.<sup>5</sup> Alberto Issac's *Conversaciones con Gabriel Figueroa* (1993) and Farouk Thoyer's article 'La puissance du noir et blanc', concentrate on Figueroa's career and his stories about the films he shot and the people with whom he worked. The dedicated issue of *Artes de México* (1988) is also mainly biographical and includes personal testimonies by Figueroa's friends and colleagues. There is much of interest in these studies, but ultimately they perpetuate the mythic status that has built up around the cinematographer and his work. None of these writers examines his films, nor do they address the inconsistencies in the system that produced them and which are manifest on the screen. In fact, to date, the only critical study of the work is by Charles Ramírez Berg in his articles, 'Figueroa's Skies and Oblique Perspective, Notes on the Development of the Classical Mexican Style' (1992) and 'The Cinematic Invention of Mexico: The Poetics and Politics of the Fernández-Figueroa Style' (1994). As the titles suggest, the essays aim to construct Figueroa as the innovator of a Mexican cinematic classicism. However, as I argue in Chapter Two, despite the value of his critical analysis of the cinematographer, Ramírez Berg uncritically employs what Alan Knight calls the 'quasi-metaphysical terms' of *mexicanidad* and *lo mexicano* and consequently falls into the trap of reiterating post-revolutionary nationalist ideology that obscures any empirical analysis (Knight, 1992: 99).<sup>6</sup>

Rather than follow the biographical, anecdotal or national trajectories espoused by the writers mentioned above, it is the intention of this thesis to explore Figueroa from new perspectives to suggest a wider range of angles from which to view his work. This is not to deny the validity of biography for an understanding of Figueroa's trajectory. In fact, I shall first give a brief overview of Figueroa's cinematographic, political and social development in order to contextualise the elevation of his status in Mexican culture and to clarify the context within which his images were made and functioned. This is then followed by an analysis of how Figueroa attained iconic status, which is crucial for it reveals why he is so central to Mexican culture and, consequently, what his images have come to represent in the national imagination.

## **Figueroa's Life and Career**

There is no standard biography of Figueroa. The following overview draws on the detailed published interviews by Poniatowska (1996) and Issac (1993), together with other sources, specifically his published memoirs edited by Jaime Soler Frost (2005), the unpublished manuscript written in 1988 from which the memoirs were taken and other interviews Figueroa gave to journalists and critics. Rather than discuss details of his personal life, which are available in Poniatowska's book, I concentrate here on biographical information that relates to Figueroa's entry into the film industry and his subsequent development as a cinematographer.

Orphaned at an early age, Figueroa and his brother, Roberto, were brought up by their father's sister, Sara, in Mexico City. In 1924, at the age of seventeen, Figueroa was accepted at the national music conservatory to study violin. At the same time he enrolled for art classes at the Academia San Carlos and at the Eduardo Guerrero studios to learn photography (Figueroa, 1988: 16).

However, shortly after he started his studies, his aunt died. The lawyer who administered the Figueras' inheritance had mortgaged the property left to them and had invested the proceeds badly, leaving the brothers insolvent. Destitute, they had no choice but to abandon their studies and start work.

Figueroa initially worked with a photographer in a studio that made fast-turnaround portraits. The pace of work and the demands of commercial photography would inform the speed of his later work as a cinematographer and, indeed, later in his career he became renowned for his speed and economy on set (Figueroa, 1988: 20). He subsequently worked with José Guadalupe Velasco, the first photographer in Mexico to use artificial lighting. Velasco created highly stylised and theatrical portraits and during his time with the photographer, Figueroa became fascinated with the relationship between lighting and printing processes, factors that became fundamental to his working practices as a cinematographer (Figueroa, 1988: 24).

In the early 1930s, an old school friend, Gilberto Martínez Solares, introduced him to the Canadian émigré cinematographer, Alex Phillips, who employed him to take the stills on *Revolución* (Miguel Contreras Torres, 1932) and within two years Figueroa had progressed from stills man to lighting engineer on *El escándalo* (Chano Urueta, 1933). In 1935, he secured a grant from the newly established Cinematográfico Latino America SA (CLASA) to study in Hollywood with Gregg Toland, who became his friend, mentor and a foremost influence on Figueroa's development as a cinematographer.<sup>7</sup>

On his return to Mexico, he worked for director of photography, Jack Draper, as a camera operator on Fernando de Fuentes's *Vámonos con Pancho Villa* (1935) and following the film, he formed a cooperative with de Fuentes, Alfonso Sánchez Tello and Miguel Delgado to make *Allá en el Rancho Grande* directed by de Fuentes in 1936 (Figueroa, 1975: 216). At a cost of 65,000 pesos, the film grossed eighty million pesos, winning international awards and Figueroa's first prize for cinematography at the Venice Film Festival.<sup>8</sup>

The young cinematographer shot eleven films in the next two years, but it was not until he worked with director Chano Urueta on *La noche de los Mayas* (1939) and *Los de abajo* (1939), that his distinctive approach to cinematographic style began to develop (Issac, 1993: 27; Figueroa, 1988: 68). He joined Urueta, the actor Arturo de Córdoba, assistant director Miguel Delgado and the sound engineer B.J. Kroger, in a cooperative which transformed into one of the key production companies of the early 1940s, Films Mundiales, headed by manager and producer, Agustín J. Finck (Feder, 1996: 2-14). Following the commercial success of its first film, *Que viene mi marido* (Chano Urueta, 1939), the company launched Julio Bracho's directorial career with *¡Ay, que tiempos, señor don Simon!* (1941). When actors Pedro Armendáriz and Dolores del Río, together with the director, Emilio Fernández, joined the company in 1943 a profitable production ensemble was formed.

Figueroa describes the early period of Films Mundiales as a time when he began to explore '*la mística mexicana*', a concept which developed during meetings of musicians, theatre people, dancers, architects, writers, fine artists and filmmakers at Dolores del Río's Mexico City home (Figueroa, 1988: 74-75).

Figuerola describes '*la mística mexicana*' as the creative community's efforts to transform their shared ideas and values into a cohesive Mexican aesthetic. However, he does not elucidate on what constituted the group's notion of Mexican, nor does he detail the content of the group's mutual aims and purpose. Nevertheless, despite its nebulous character, the concept informed his development as a cinematographer and in Chapter Two, I examine the term's association with the equally ill-defined notion of *mexicanidad*.

Whilst he developed his career, Figuerola was also politically active. He played a central role in the rehabilitation of Spanish exiles who had fled to Mexico from Franco's regime, and in 1940, the Republican exiles' committee nominated him as an honorary member. Two years later, he travelled to the Disney studios in Hollywood to represent the Mexican film industry in a seminar on visual education and literacy. The seminar was organised through the Office of the Coordinator of Interamerican Affairs (OCCIA) as part of the wartime good neighbour policy. Despite his controversial presentation on how support for agriculture, health and hygiene would be more helpful in Mexico than a US literacy campaign, Figuerola's participation established him as one of the key figures in Mexico's work with the Office.

In his role as secretary of the technicians' section during the union disputes of 1945, Figuerola played a central part in fundamental changes to the film union that led to the foundation of a new organisation, the Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Producción Cinematográfica de la República Mexicana (STPC de la RM).<sup>9</sup> His commitment to the union movement continued throughout his career and his active campaigning and support for actions such as the Nueva Rosita and Cloete miners' strikes in 1950 against American Smelting and the student demonstrations during the 1950s and late 1960s, resulted in his becoming a well-known and popular figure.<sup>10</sup>

The complex links between the US and Mexican film industries, that became increasingly apparent during the war years, led Figuerola to shoot two major US co-productions in the mid-1940s: *La Perla* (Emilio Fernández, 1945) and *The Fugitive* (John Ford, 1947). *La Perla* was a co-production between RKO

Radio Pictures and Aguila Films in Mexico. Location shooting took place near Acapulco and the interiors were shot at the Churubusco studios in Mexico City, where RKO had a 50% holding and a contract to supply equipment and import specialist experts from Hollywood to train the studio's Mexican technicians. John Steinbeck adapted his story of the same title into the screenplay and two versions were made, one in Spanish and the other in English, for the US and international market (Figueroa, 1988: 77).

In 1947, on the recommendation of Toland, Figueroa collaborated with John Ford on *The Fugitive*, an adaptation of Graham Greene's novel *The Power and Glory* (Figueroa, 1988: 108). The director and cinematographer quickly established a close working relationship and Ford gave Figueroa complete cinematographic freedom. On completion of the film, the director signed Figueroa up to a three-picture contract with his production company, Argosy. However, when Figueroa arrived in Hollywood the US entertainment union the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Moving Picture Technicians, Artists and Allied Crafts of the United States (IATSE), led by Richard Walsh, withdrew his US union ticket. This was because in 1946, there had been a disagreement between the IATSE and Figueroa's union during the Hollywood laboratory technicians' strike. The technicians were striking against the wishes of the IATSE leadership. The US laboratories and union had approached the Mexicans to send personnel to work in the Hollywood or to process the film in Mexican laboratories. The STPC rejected IATSE's request.<sup>11</sup> Unable to work without a union card, Figueroa could not take up the contract but, as Argosy had already signed him, Ford paid for the three years as agreed.

In 1948, Toland died unexpectedly of a heart attack. Sam Goldwyn offered Toland's job to Figueroa on a fixed five-year, exclusive contract with an option for another five years. Despite Goldwyn's assurances that there would be no problems with visas or work permits, Figueroa declined the offer. His reason was that in Mexico he could retain an artistic freedom that he saw as limited in the Hollywood system. However, in light of the circumstances in which Walsh had blocked Figueroa's US union ticket because of his left-wing activities and



given the increasing hysteria of right-wing politicians in the US, Figueroa's refusal of Goldwyn's offer is more indicative of his astute political awareness than his wish to retain artistic integrity. The previous year, the House of Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), led by Senator MacCarthy, had begun its investigations into the political activities of leading figures in US cinema and in the early 1950s, director Elia Kazan, together with screenwriter and director Robert Rossen, gave Figueroa's name to the committee.<sup>12</sup> Figueroa's involvement with left-wing union politics and his close associations with members of the Communist and Socialist parties, made him a prime candidate for investigation by HUAC and Federal Bureau of Investigation files on Figueroa indicate that FBI surveillance of him started sometime during this period.<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, the critical enthusiasm his work received in the Eastern Bloc reinforced the US authorities' view of Figueroa as a politically subversive character, which intensified when, in 1950 he travelled to Karlovy-Vary festival in Czechoslovakia to attend a retrospective of his work and accept an award. Further, left-wing French critic and writer, Georges Sadoul gave him a public ovation at the opening and as a result introduced Figueroa's work to Western European critics and audiences.<sup>14</sup>

1950 was an eventful year for Figueroa in his cinematographic work as he also began his collaboration with Spanish surrealist director, Luis Buñuel on *Los olvidados*. The period marks a transition in Figueroa's work, both in terms of the type of films he accepted and the stylistic direction that he took during the rest of the decade. Figueroa admired the surrealism of Bunuel's work and saw the director as having the necessary flexibility of vision to communicate Mexican reality.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, he also perceived surrealism as a struggle for liberty of expression, 'una lucha por la libertad que no conseguía, como no se consigue por lo general en ninguna parte' (Figueroa, 1988: 214). Although distinct in their political expression, the aim to challenge limitations linked the two filmmakers.<sup>16</sup> Buñuel attempted to undermine the narrow confines of Western societies, which entrapped human development and expression and isolated the individual from self-expression and fulfilment.<sup>17</sup> Figueroa sought

to expand the limits of visual perception. However, whereas Buñuel directed the audience towards the grotesque, Figueroa exposed beauty, whether epic or mundane. The tension in their collaborative work that is a result of the apparent contradiction in their perceptions, nevertheless, produces a coherent and powerful cinematic vision.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to his work with Buñuel during the early 1950s, Figueroa collaborated increasingly with Roberto Gavaldón and, significantly, his thirteen-year association with Fernández ended with *Una cita de amor* in 1956. The previous year, Gavaldón had invited Figueroa to Spain to collaborate on a film starring Jean Gabin and Dolores del Río. Figueroa declined, replying, 'Gracias por la oferta. Para los buenos asuntos y los buenos amigos no tengo condiciones especiales. En caso de filmarse en Madrid iré siempre que quites a Franco del reparto' (Figueroa, 1988: 152). Five years later he refused Buñuel's invitation to collaborate on *Viridiana*, which was also shot in Spain.

Although many of the films Figueroa worked on in the 1950s and 1960s were critically as well as commercially successful, the Mexican film industry slipped into an artistic and economic decline.<sup>19</sup> In 1962, Figueroa wrote,

[N]uestro cine, efectivamente, ha bajado de calidad. Quizás porque los productores no pueden hacer inversiones que requiere la mayor calidad. Por reducir costos se hacen películas de baja calidad, y porque son de baja calidad se dificulta la recuperación económica.

(1962: 10)

Indeed, the early 1960s signal a point of departure in Figueroa's career. Although he continued to work with Buñuel, shooting *The Young One* (1960) and *El ángel exterminador* (1962), the Spanish director worked increasingly in Europe. *Simón del desierto* (1965) was his last collaboration with Figueroa and from 1966 onwards Buñuel shot all his films in Spain and France. Like Buñuel, during the early 1960s, Figueroa began to work on international projects and co-productions, although the US continued to deny him a work visa. In 1963, he collaborated with director John Huston on *The Night of the*

*Iguana*, shot entirely in Mexico and which earned him a nomination for an Academy Award, whilst he also continued to work with Gavaldón and Rodríguez, who directed the internationally renowned Japanese actor, Toshiro Mifune, in *Ánimas Trujano*.

Figueroa's union, the STPC, which had functioned on a closed-shop basis since its foundation, organised a competition for experimental film in 1964. The intention was to break the cycle of decline in the quality of films and to open up dialogue for reform and renovation throughout the industry. Although the contest did not produce any major changes in the structure of Mexican production, Figueroa worked on four films by new directors in the mid to late 1960s. The first three were shot in 1965 *Una alma pura* and *Las dos Elenas* (Juan Ibañez) and *Lola de mi vida* (Manuel Barbachano Ponce). The final film, *¿La pax?* (Wolf Rilla), shot in 1967, uncannily anticipated the political turbulence of the following year, both in Mexico and internationally, recorded by Figueroa in his memoirs as the Tlatelolco massacre, the assassination of Martin Luther King, the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the USSR and the repression following the student uprisings in Paris (Figueroa, 1988: 282-283).

Despite Figueroa's contentious relationship with the US authorities and the continued refusal to grant him permission to work, in 1968 the US Academy of Motion Pictures Sciences and Arts elected him as a member. Given the burgeoning production difficulties in Mexico, Figueroa accepted work on two more Hollywood films; *Two Mules for Sister Sarah* (Don Siegel, 1969) and *Kelly's Heroes* (Brian C. Hutton, 1970). Filmed in Morelos, *Two Mules for Sister Sarah* starred Shirley Maclaine and Clint Eastwood and it was on Eastwood's recommendation that MGM offered *Kelly's Heroes* to Figueroa, which was shot in Yugoslavia the following year.

During the 1970s, Figueroa spent increasing amounts of time outside of Mexico, on lecture tours and participating on juries at international film festivals from Argentina to Iran (Figueroa, 2005: 256-257). Significantly, in his memoirs and in the manuscript on which they are based, he writes very little about the films he shot during the 1970s. The majority were badly written

and produced, and the only films he cites of any importance are *María* (Jorge Issacs, 1971), *La generala* and *Divinas palabras* (Juan Ibañez, 1970 and 1977) and *Cananea* (Marcela Fernández Violante, 1974). Indeed, he symbolises the period 1976-1982, the *sexenio* of José López Portillo, as a black page in his memoirs, on which he writes 'sin comentarios' (1988: 305 & 2005: 261).<sup>20</sup>

Throughout the forty years of his career from 1936 to 1976, Figueroa had shot on average five films a year.<sup>21</sup> However, by the late 1970s he was shooting only two projects a year. In 1983, he worked once again in Mexico with John Huston on *Under the Volcano*. He recalls that there were many technical and personnel problems on the shoot, including camera breakages and freak accidents that destroyed lights. One of Figueroa's assistants was in a car accident, actors were injured on set, Gunther Gerszo, the art director and Angela Dodson, the costume designer were both assaulted and robbed. Figueroa believed the film was jinxed and that the crew and actors were 'embruados', because six major projects fell through within a year of finishing *Under the Volcano* (Figueroa, 1988: 312-315). Furthermore, when Huston invited Figueroa, an elected member of the US Academy and an Academy Award nominee, to shoot *Prizzi's Honor* the US authorities again refused him a work permit. Although he never officially retired from the industry, *Under the Volcano*, was Figueroa's last film.

Sixty years after his film début, in 1994, the American Society of Cinematographers (ASC) presented Figueroa with the prestigious international award for lifetime achievement. In Hollywood, the one place that had banned his working there for over forty years, the assembled US film elite gave the cinematographer a standing ovation. Three years later, on his ninetieth birthday, newspapers and journals dedicated their lead articles to Figueroa. When, a week later, he died, the celebratory reviews transformed into eulogies.<sup>22</sup> The obituaries in broadsheets, tabloids and commercial television and radio demonstrate the popular esteem in which he was held and capture a sense of nostalgia for the man and his work. Blanca Ruiz succinctly expresses Figueroa's key role in the creation of a national visual paradigm that is acknowledged in all the obituaries:

Con su muerte se despiden no solo uno de los autores más importantes del País, sino una época memorable de México.

(Ruiz, 1997: 23)

But how, then, did Figueroa become the 'author' of Mexico and how and why have his images retained their iconic status over the past sixty years?

### **Figueroa as Icon**

In the early decades of the twentieth century, the nascent Mexican film industry was regarded as a purely commercial enterprise, lacking in either cultural or artistic significance. The state's national cultural programme recognised theatre, music, literature and especially the political value of painting through its sponsorship of the muralist movement, which became the approved visual arbiter of the national image.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, when Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros and José Clemente Orozco acknowledged and embraced Figueroa and his work, they established him as an artist, rather than an industrial technician. As a result, Figueroa's personal status and that of Mexico's cinema changed dramatically.<sup>24</sup>

Unlike the post-revolutionary Soviet state, during the decade immediately following the violent phase of the revolution (1920-1930), the Mexican government did not consider film as a potential medium for disseminating revolutionary nationalist ideology.<sup>25</sup> Although José Vasconcelos, as Secretary of Education in 1924, had the declared purpose to communicate with and educate the Mexican people, he was suspicious of cinema and perceived the industry as commercial entertainment coming from outside Mexico, from Europe and, worse, the US. Moreover, he was distrustful of the connections between the handful of small commercial production companies in Mexico and its northern neighbour (Joseph and Gilbert, 2002: 15). The government's attitude changed, however, and during the 1930s and throughout the 1940s cinema was to serve as one of the main channels through which the state communicated its message of a progressive Mexico.<sup>26</sup>

In common with many cultural producers before him, the careful construction of a prestigious artistic heritage formed the basis for Figueroa's status as a cultural icon. Paradoxically, for a figure who represents and expresses what he himself termed the '*mística mexicana*', many of the artistic forebears mentioned by writers and, indeed, by the cinematographer himself, are from Europe or the United States (Figueroa, 1988: 74).<sup>27</sup> Novelist Carlos Fuentes cites the artists Fragonard, Goya, Géricault and Delacroix as evident influences on Figueroa's work (Fuentes, 1992: 34). Others put forward Rembrandt, Da Vinci and Vermeer to legitimise his creative legacy and celebrity.<sup>28</sup> His major cinematic influences are universally accepted as the now legendary Soviet filmmaking duo Sergei Eisenstein and his director of photography Eduard Tisse and their enigmatic, unfinished film *¡Que Viva México!*, together with German expressionism, US photographer Paul Strand and Figueroa's mentor and friend, US cinematographer Gregg Toland.<sup>29</sup> Critics cite his Mexican influences as the painter Dr Atl (Gerardo Murillo), the printmaker José Guadalupe Posada, Leopoldo Méndez of the Taller Gráfica Popular and the composer Carlos Chávez.<sup>30</sup> However, despite this eminent list of European old masters and Mexican artists, undoubtedly the most significant connections in terms of his iconic status in Mexico were the muralists Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros. Figueroa himself acknowledges:

I was the only cinematographer to have such a connection with the muralists. I always found in them what I liked and they saw my pictures, liked them and critiqued them. They said that my films were murals in movement; greater murals, because mine travelled and theirs did not. All these artists inspired us to create a Mexican image for the cinema. Somehow we found a common basis and I was fortunate enough to see my images accepted all over the world.

(Dey, 1995: 42)

The connection with these artists is noteworthy not simply for the aesthetic interests and political views they shared with Figueroa. What is significant in terms of his iconic status is the common ideological ground that Figueroa

inhabited with the *los tres grandes* of the Mexican cultural pantheon and how this functioned in relationship to the state during the 1930s and 1940s. Despite the contradictions that had arisen within the Mexican state's interpretation and manipulation of the ideals of the revolution under the banner of revolutionary nationalism, Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros, although holding diverse views and expressions of the left, all held a common belief in the re-distribution of land and wealth, universal suffrage and justice. Each muralist was actively involved in advocating and fighting for workers' rights and their work communicated their commitment to their ideals and aims for the country.<sup>31</sup> Such idealists provided good popular icons. Although they were often critical of the state, the state provided a patronage that supported a large portion of their work. Although diverse in their aesthetic and thematic concerns and their stance on social and political issues, the Mexican government held up the muralists' images, and later those of Figueroa, as an exemplary embodiment of *lo mexicano*, an ambiguous, yet central tenet in revolutionary nationalism.

### **Cultural Icons, Transnationalism and Hegemony**

Revolutionary nationalism proposed Mexico as a nation with a strong, independent identity. However, in reality, the Mexican state, culture and the film industry were dependent on systems of financial and political support from the United States. The work of Rivera, Siqueiros, Orozco and later Figueroa offered a visual rendering of national identity that functioned as a mask to disguise the deep, transnational links between Mexico and the United States.<sup>32</sup> Mexican cinema and culture were not, however, simple conduits of state and US foreign policy. Rather, they promoted an idea of Mexico as an autonomous political, social and cultural entity. In the final analysis, however, *mexicanidad*, an ill-defined term that sanctioned all things Mexican as an embodiment of national spirit, was inherently nationalist in its stance and ultimately justified and supported a Mexican ruling elite whose financial systems and political interests were, paradoxically, embedded in close relations with their fellow elites in the United States.<sup>33</sup> Despite ostensible changes in the economic make-up and political preferences of the ruling classes over the years, Figueroa and the muralists persist as national icons in Mexico. I argue that this is symptomatic of the transnational interests that continue to be deeply

rooted within the Mexican elite, and that the superficial nationalist impulses in the images continue to serve a key role in Mexican hegemonic practices.

Alan Knight's lucid discussion of the political elite's handling of Mexico's economics that retained a nationalist, socially inclusive appearance, whilst courting international fiscal partnership, cogently explains how power was kept by controlled consensus rather than overt oppression (1992). Knight's analysis resonates with a Gramscian concept of hegemony which in absorbing dissent, neutralises it to ensure the dominance of the ruling status quo. Whilst never seriously threatening society, culture maintains its expression within the overall socio-economic structure of society which, in turn, dictates the modes and means of expression.

Not all beliefs and aims of individuals and groups are, however, directly determined by economics. Ideologies have relative autonomy from the economic base. Claudio Lomnitz highlights how Mexico is particularly complex in this regard. In his critique of Benedict Anderson's seminal discussion of nation and nationalism (1991), he argues that, 'Nationalism always involves articulating discourses of fraternity with hierarchical relationships, a fact that allows for the formulation of different kinds of national imaginaries' (Lomnitz, 2001: 11). He goes on to contend that 'deep comradeship' is between 'full citizens', who act as mediators between the national state and their dependants, the 'part citizens' (children, women, Indians, the ignorant). As a result, a dynamic is established between the dominant hegemony, the franchised and disenfranchised (Lomnitz, 2001: 12). Further, the political structure that developed in post-revolutionary Mexico was not homogeneous. It developed and continued to grow with a fluctuating frame of reference between capitalism and socialism, the extreme right and the extreme left. As I will go on to explore in subsequent chapters, the expression of the dynamic between the poor and the ruling elite, the right and the left and their intimate relation to race is particularly resonant in Figueroa's work.



## Hegemony and the Imagined Mexico

What the muralists, Figueroa and their work represent is a connection to a Mexico that never actually existed. It is a Mexico outside of the ebb and flow of socio-economics and politics, yet one that is vivid in the national imaginary. This constant remembrance of things *not* past, is a desire for that imaginary Mexico. It goes beyond the nostalgia that feeds the consumer dreams of contemporary society, it is a belief system that is firmly implanted in the Mexican imagination: even if it did not exist, it is what should have existed, a Mexico to which all should aspire. Figueroa's concept of the '*mística mexicana*', a mystical Mexico that was 'deep' yet artificial brought into focus the liberal society that ultimately reinforced an arcane and narrow image of Mexico that supported the ideology of revolutionary nationalism (Lomnitz, 2001). Such a worldview conveniently flagged up the complexities inherent in Mexican society established through historical events and political circumstance, but did nothing to suggest an alternative. As a result, it continues to remain convenient for the Mexican ruling elite to grant Figueroa iconic status. In such an ideological project, his socialist beliefs, his political lobbying for workers' rights, his role in the establishment of the major film union, his contentious, complex relationship with the United States, his privileged background, his subsequent rags-to-riches story, his talent and international recognition make him an exemplary figure.

Figueroa's images continue to play a central role as cultural icons in contemporary society just as they did during the 1940s to 1960s. At the beginning of the new millennium, the links between Mexico and the US are closer and the reality of Mexican identity is even more confused and fractured than before. To present a superficially cohesive memory of a mythic Mexico that 'had it all', despite its proximity to the empire in the North, and to hold up the men and women who were part of its creation as role models for the nation, is an extremely effective and flexible ideological tool. Its adaptability suits the non-iconoclastic nature of Mexico, a culture that is historically syncretic. Rather than destroy icons and idols, the ruling elite has adapted and re-imagined them to maintain their hegemony. The Mexican state and its dominant class, containing families that have held power since colonial times,

have used the imaginary Mexico to reaffirm and perpetuate their positions of authority during and after the revolution. Conveniently, and not by coincidence, iconic personalities, despite their rejection and criticism of the state are, more often than not, born and bred within the elite and provide a public yet highly containable 'opposition' to the dominant classes. Such icons provoke, therefore, a manageable rebellion within the ranks, rather than a serious threat from outside.

### **The Classical Paradigm**

Given the iconic position Figueroa holds in Mexico, it might be seen as contradictory to my argument to embark on a thesis about Figueroa at all. Despite its critical angle, in the final analysis, surely *any* work on Figueroa merely reinforces the process of mythification to which he has been subject? It might even be judged prudent to write in more general terms about cinematographers in Mexico. Nevertheless, there are compelling reasons why I have chosen to focus on Figueroa as the central subject of this investigation and it is important at this point to outline my motives and purpose as they are central frames of reference that inform this study.

First, the little critical work on cinematography that exists centres almost exclusively on the United States and Europe and is discussed in terms of what film scholars, David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson have defined and promoted as 'Hollywood classical style' (1985).<sup>34</sup> Indeed, Bordwell dedicates much of his 1994 essay on deep focus which appears in Staiger's book on the Hollywood studio system, to an examination of cinematographer Gregg Toland's work (Staiger, 1994: 93-124). The essay is exemplary in its meticulous research and argument but, as with his work in the co-authored volume now a core text for film studies students (*The Classical Hollywood Cinema*), the styles attributed to cinematographers, such as Figueroa's mentor, Gregg Toland, are viewed within a carefully constructed paradigm of classicism.

In their deployment of the term classical, the authors establish Hollywood as the progenitor of cinematic style and set the ideal paradigm for cinematic form. At the same time, Bordwell *et al* firmly situate Hollywood as central and

analysis of the image in terms of the cinematographic process and input of the cinematographer. That is to say, we must distinguish between how the physical, technical construction of the image relates to the narrative themes of the film and how the image that is made works as a product of the ideologies that surround a film. A critical consideration of the role of cinematography and the cinematographer can, therefore, engage with the image and its relation to ideology. To my knowledge, there has been no major work dealing with cinematography in this way and this study extends previous methodologies to suggest new directions for further examination of the moving image.

Finally, as mentioned above, Gabriel Figueroa holds an exceptional position in Mexican cinema history and an investigation into his work opens up debate on the wider issues of the social, economic and political workings of the Mexican film industry and how Figueroa's images functioned as a visual expression of Mexico in relation to the hegemonic practices of successive governing elites.

*Pulling Focus: New Perspectives on the Work of Gabriel Figueroa*, aims to do what its title suggests, to readjust the emphasis from the anecdotal and biographical to provide a critical analysis of Figueroa's images, the ways in which they function and their role in contemporary Mexico. This requires a *new* way of looking at cinematography, a fresh focus that encourages alternative perspectives on Figueroa's work that spring from empirical evidence within the images themselves. Such an approach necessitates a navigation between the strong current of national cinema discourse in Mexican film scholarship and a transnational standpoint, that acknowledges and critically engages with the presence of the United States, Europe and Hollywood and their impact on the Mexican industry.

This thesis does not intend to be a definitive study of Figueroa's filmography. The sheer volume of his work precludes in-depth analysis of every film in practical terms alone. Rather, this study aims to suggest new critical positions from which to develop future investigation and critical analysis, not only of Figueroa's work, but also the images of other cinematographers, who have been overlooked by film scholarship. With this intention, the thesis is structured

thematically, rather than chronologically, and selects a variety of films from various points in Figueroa's career to illustrate the specific subject area of each chapter.

In Chapter One, after a definition of cinematography and its intricate balance of technology and aesthetic, there is a brief outline of the cinematographer's tools and an exploration of his role in the filmmaking process.<sup>36</sup> The chapter then proceeds to challenge the auteurist assumptions that pervade film theory and foregrounds the essentially collaborative nature of filmmaking. Finally, it offers an overview of how scholars have discussed the moving image and suggests new paradigms of analysis which lay the foundation for my subsequent analysis of Figueroa's work.

Chapter Two deconstructs the prevalent use of the Fernández-Figueroa paradigm that has conflated the work of the director Emilio Fernández with that of Figueroa. It questions the assumptions that position the cinematographer's images as part of a national trajectory and unpacks the meaning and use of concepts such as *mexicanidad* and *lo mexicano*. On close examination of the political and economic contexts of the developing Mexican film industry, it becomes clear that, contrary to what critics have defined as a national cinema, Mexican films were inherently transnational. Figueroa's background and training serves as a good example of how transnationalism informed the development of his cinematography through European and US influences, most importantly via his apprenticeship and friendship with Gregg Toland. Further, primary sources from the files kept on Figueroa by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) give evidence of the highly complex transnational political pressures on the cinematographer that circumscribed Figueroa's development and work. In conjunction with other sources, the files lead to a re-evaluation of notions of the national in Mexican cinema and an appreciation of how transnational politics and economics determined its relationship to nationalist ideology and the United States.

Focusing on *Allá en el Rancho Grande* (Fernando de Fuentes, 1936) as a case study, Chapter Three explores how Figueroa constructs images in relation to

music and sound. The film is significant in that it was fundamental in establishing the *comedia ranchera* genre, so central to Mexican film during the following decade. Figueroa's handling of the film's visual language set the benchmark for subsequent films in the genre and the foundation for visualising music in his ensuing work. The chapter also discusses the lack of connection between the study of sound and image in film and suggests a synthesis of critical approaches to enable a more syncretic appreciation of both elements. Moreover, although critics have interpreted *Allá en el Rancho Grande* as a 'reactionary', nationalist text, on examination of the visual language, it becomes clear that the film transcends its reputation to reveal a complex web of contradictions in nationalist rhetoric and imagery that resulted from the transnational relations so fundamental to the film's production.

Chapter Four focuses on landscape and how Figueroa's work has become synonymous with the visual rendition of Mexican rural space. I explore how the cinematographer created a visual identity for Mexico whilst, simultaneously, his images expose a paradox in the national imagination that informs the images. A brief overview of the contexts within which Figueroa constructed his rural images is followed by an outline of how critics discuss space in film scholarship. The ensuing close visual analyses of *Río Escondido* and *Ánimas Trujano* examine how Figueroa's construction of space and the characters within the landscape communicate the complex social and racial hierarchies inherent in notions of Mexican national identity.

Figueroa's images of the urban space and specifically the capital are examined in Chapter Five. An outline of how Mexico City was not only constructed physically, but also how it was imaged and imagined, is followed by an overview of how the city's image developed to establish the aesthetic and political contexts in which Figueroa represented the urban space cinematographically. Further, and fundamental to my investigation of Figueroa's visual rendition of the city, is an acknowledgment of how notions of modernity, particularly during the mid-twentieth century, when Figueroa was at the peak of his career, affected the images he produced. The drive to modernity, so essential to successive political regimes in the post-war period,

not only affected the physical appearance and experience of the city, but also provoked changes in the urban population. The changes radically affected the role of women during the mid-1940s and, from the post-war period onwards, film narratives were increasingly located in urban environments and the main characters in the melodramas and *cabareteras* (an inherently urban genre), that dominated Mexican screens, were women. As a result, Figueroa's images of women in the city space raise issues connected with modernity and that emerged with the disjunctions and contradictions that the burgeoning Mexican urban space provoked. Close analysis of the seminal *cabaretera* film *Salón México* (Fernández, 1948) and the lesser known, but equally significant melodrama, *Días de otoño* (Gavaldón, 1962) shows how the cinematography in both films positions women in relation to the modern city space to reveal ideological fissures in the key symbol of national identity, motherhood.

In the final chapter, I examine Buñuel's Mexican films, specifically the work produced with his most consistent collaborator, Gabriel Figueroa. I consider notions of exile in relation to the two filmmakers and the hybridity, present in their work together, that accentuates the presence of displacement identified in Buñuel's work. Notions of exile and 'otherness' are explored in the way in which they correspond to the experience and work of Figueroa and Buñuel and I elaborate on the idea of their positions as 'outsiders/insiders' in relation to the social and moral themes conveyed through visual style in *Los olvidados* (1950). Close analysis of *El ángel exterminador* (1962) and *Él* (1952) focuses on how Buñuel and Figueroa employ expressionist convention and gothic tradition to develop visual and narrative themes. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how the two filmmakers developed a visual language that both communicates yet challenges the central themes of each film to provide a subversive insight into the internal workings and demise of the bourgeoisie.

The appendices at the end of the thesis provide reference points in the following order: (i) Figueroa's complete filmography; (ii) Synopses of the films mentioned in the thesis; (iii) Catalogue of Figueroa's national and international awards; (iv) Glossary of technical terminology. A DVD containing relevant sequences from the films discussed is also included.

---

<sup>1</sup> The memoirs are edited by Jaime Soler Frost from the autobiographical manuscript from which I have been working over the past six years and to which I make reference throughout this thesis. The manuscript is a transcript, edited by Figueroa, that was made from taped conversations with his nephew, Juan Antonio Mateos in 1988. The memoirs vary from the original manuscript in that there are syntactical corrections and omissions from the original transcript.

<sup>2</sup> See for example Issac (1993), Poniatowska (1996), Cakoff (1995). Journal articles include Ramírez Berg (1992 & 1994), White (1982), Feder (1996) and Dey (1995). *Artes de México* published a special issue dedicated to Figueroa in Winter 1988, which was reprinted in Autumn 1992. Television programmes include, *Homenaje a Gabriel Figueroa* (1997) Channel 22, 27 April; *La suerte de vivir, Gabriel Figueroa* (1997) Channel 40, 3 May and on radio *Entrevistas con Gabriel Figueroa* (1997) Radio Educación UNAM, 12 May. Major exhibitions to date include: *Gabriel Figueroa*, Casa-Museo de Diego Rivera, XVIII Festival Internacional Cervantino, Guanajuato (1990); *Gabriel Figueroa*, Festival des Trois Continents, Nantes, France (1990); *Gabriel Figueroa*, Valladolid Film Festival, Spain (1992); *Gabriel Figueroa; Veinticinco imágenes en platino*, Galería de Arte Mexicana, Mexico City (1992); *Gabriel Figueroa y la pintura Mexicana*, Museo de Arte Carillo Gil, Mexico City (1996). See Appendix iii for a list of Figueroa's awards.

<sup>3</sup> At the time of writing, a retrospective of Figueroa stills and equipment is planned for the Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City in September 2007. In the UK, a season of his films, together with an exhibition of digital stills, selected and curated by Ceri Higgins, Linda Pariser and Gabriel Figueroa Flores, is scheduled at the Cornerhouse, Manchester in April 2007.

<sup>4</sup> See for example Charles Ramírez Berg's essays, in which he assumes that Figueroa's work embodied nationalist sentiment and politics. A critique of Ramírez Berg's work follows in Chapter Two.

<sup>5</sup> There was some dispute between the Figueroa family and Poniatowska with regard to privacy issues when the book was published (Figueroa Flores, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> Despite their shortcomings, the articles provide an important counterpoint to the critical position taken in this thesis and, therefore, the first half of the following chapter is dedicated to a critique of Ramírez Berg's analysis.

<sup>7</sup> Toland's influence on Figueroa is discussed in Chapter Two.

<sup>8</sup> There is a detailed analysis of *Allá en el Rancho Grande* in Chapter Three.

<sup>9</sup> See Issac (1993: 51-64) for a detailed account by Figueroa of the dispute and establishment of the STPC.

<sup>10</sup> Fidel Velázquez, with whom Figueroa had a confrontation, continued as head of the Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos (CTM) until his death in 1993. As time went on, the STPC introduced restrictive protection practices. This, together with dubious management of the other film and exhibition unions and the perennial problem of investment, provoked and exacerbated the constant crisis of Mexican cinema.

---

<sup>11</sup> In the previous year, 1946, there had been a disagreement between the IATSE and Figueroa's union, the STPC, during the Hollywood laboratory technicians' strike. The technicians were striking against the wishes of the IATSE leadership. The laboratories and union had approached the Mexicans to send personnel to work in the US or to process the film in Mexican laboratories. The Mexican unions rejected IATSE's request. Walsh visited Mexico to question Figueroa about the STPC's position and his personal politics and ended the interview with the question, 'Are you a communist?'. Figueroa replied that it was none of his business (Issac, 1993: 38).

<sup>12</sup> Figueroa discusses his naming in the HUAC trials by Kazan and Rossen in Issac (1993: 38-40&42-47) and in Poniatowska (1996: 75-77).

<sup>13</sup> In September 2003, I received copies of extracts from FBI files kept on Figueroa under the Freedom of Information Act. The content of these files is examined in Chapter Two.

<sup>14</sup> See Sadoul's article in *Écran Français* 267, (21), 21 August, 1950, p.6.

<sup>15</sup> 'Ese mundo del surrealismo traspasa el mundo de la razón y rompe los patrones lógicos con los que se maneja el mundo real. Lo lógico de gran parte de su cine es lo ilógico, lo incoherente del pensamiento de la conducta del hombre. El surrealismo le permite la flexibilidad necesaria de sus imágenes y de la realidad que conocemos en nuestra cultura'. (Figueroa, 1988: 214).

<sup>16</sup> For a lucid and amusing analysis of Buñuel as a revolutionary artist see Basu (2004).

<sup>17</sup> Buñuel's autobiographical writings (1983) demonstrate his constant exploration of limits and boundaries. See also Paul Hammond's excellent introduction to his anthology of Surrealist writing on the cinema (1978) which examines the Surrealist fascination with film and its relationship to reality.

<sup>18</sup> Chapter Six examines the Buñuel-Figueroa collaboration in detail.

<sup>19</sup> For further details of the state of the industry and reasons for its decline during the 1950s and 1960s see de la Vega (1995: 91-93), García Riera (1992e: 7-16) and Mora (1989: 101-110). For an overview of the history and development of the film industry in relation to cultural and political change see Pineda and Paranaguá (1995: 15-62).

<sup>20</sup> See Mora (1989: 137-149) and Noble (2005: 21-22) for accounts of the consequences of the López Portillo sexenio for Mexican cinema.

<sup>21</sup> See Appendix i for details.

<sup>22</sup> Examples include the edition of *La Jornada* that dedicated a section to Figueroa with eulogies from: Pegueroa, A., Pacheco, C., Monsiváis C., Rodríguez, J.A., Bonfil, C., (1997), *La Jornada*, 24 April, pp. 1-10; Editor (1997) 'Gabriel Figueroa, 90 años del maestro de la mirada', *Reforma*, 24 April, pp. 2-3; Editor (1997), 'Recuerdos de Gabriel Figueroa', *Crónica*, 24 April, pp. 12-13; García, G., (1997) 'Gabriel Figueroa', *Reforma*, 2 May, p. 2; Pérez Turrent, T., 'In memoriam Gabriel Figueroa (1907-1997)', *Universal*, 2 May p.1.



---

<sup>23</sup> For a succinct analysis of the state's cultural programme in the post-revolutionary period and the use of cinema as propaganda and the distinct roles of fiction and non-fiction films see de los Reyes (1987: 65-94) and de la Vega (1995: 68-78).

<sup>24</sup> An exhibition at the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Alvar y Carmen T. de Carillo Gil, *Gabriel Figueroa y la Pintura Mexicana*, ran during August and September 1996 and demonstrated the close links between Figueroa and his contemporaries in the fine arts. See the catalogue that accompanied the show edited by Alejandro Beltrán (1996).

<sup>25</sup> In 1919 the Ministry of war produced three documentaries *El block-house de alta luz*, *Honor militar* and *El precio de la gloria* and in 1925 Jorge Stahl produced *La linterna de Diogenes* in support of President Elías Calles. However, film as a mass medium for educational and propaganda purposes was not considered until the mid-1930s.

<sup>26</sup> See Vaughan (2001: 471) for an account of the rise of popular entertainment and the significant role the state played in the post-revolutionary creation of national culture.

<sup>27</sup> Figueroa's concept of and use of the term *la mística mexicana* is discussed in Chapter Two.

<sup>28</sup> See Levin Rojo (1996: 21), Poniatowska (1996: 40), Issac (1993: 19), Cakoff (1995: 13), Meyer (1976: 46), Dey (1995: 42) and Figueroa (1988: 184-185).

<sup>29</sup> See Ruy Sánchez (1988: 21) and Ramírez Berg (1992) who make a brief comparative analysis between Eisenstein/Tisse and Figueroa/Fernández and also Levin Rojo (1996), Poniatowska (1996) and Mora (1982: 58).

<sup>30</sup> See for example Levin Rojo (1996: 19-27), Vázquez Mantecón (1996: 35-37), Ruy-Sánchez (1988: 20-21).

<sup>31</sup> For further discussion on the muralists and politics see David Craven (2002), Leonard Folgarait (1998), Desmond Rochfort (1993), Bruce Campbell (2003), Anthony W. Lee (1999).

<sup>32</sup> Seth Fein gives an exemplary analysis of the transnational links between the US and Mexico during the 'Golden Age' of Mexican cinema. See Fein (1999 & 2001).

<sup>33</sup> Chapter Three offers an analysis of *mexicanidad* and Mexican/US relations during this early period.

<sup>34</sup> See Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson (1985) and Bordwell (1995). I offer a critique of the authors' concept of Hollywood classical style in Chapter Two.

<sup>35</sup> That many of the key figures in Hollywood who created the 'Classical' style were immigrants to the US is a key paradox and internal contradiction in Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson's construction.

<sup>36</sup> I shall use the pronoun 'his' in relation to the cinematographer throughout this thesis. I acknowledge that there are female cinematographers who are important figures in the industry. However, at present, the majority of directors of photography are male and together with the fact that this thesis is on a male cinematographer I have decided for ease of style to use 'his' in preference to the longer 'his/her'.

## Chapter One

### Cinematography and Cinematographers

Dialogue is not what makes most of my films interesting, what communicates meaning is the image. The image has to speak forcefully on its own terms.

(Gabriel Figueroa, 1996)<sup>1</sup>

Cinematography is a creative and interpretive process which culminates in the authorship of an original work rather than the simple recording of a physical event. The images which the cinematographer brings to the screen come from the artistic vision, imagination and skill of the cinematographer working within a collaborative relationship with fellow artists.

(American Society of Cinematographers)<sup>2</sup>

With light, movement and composition, cinematography projects atmosphere, emotion, gesture and words onto a screen, in a play between image and the written word. Italian cinematographer, Vittorio Storaro defines his work as, 'Cin=movement, photo=light, graphy=writing. Cinematography is writing with light in movement' (Greenhalgh, 2003: 98). In short, it is the visual expression of the themes and content of the script. This central creative process is the work of the cinematographer who, in collaboration with the director, creates meaning through the subtle relationship of image and story.

The director-cinematographer relationship is crucial to the effectiveness of a film and therefore, when a director and cinematographer find they work together well they collaborate as much as possible. Figueroa worked consistently with Emilio Fernández, Luis Buñuel and Fernando de Fuentes. Directors Ingmar Bergman and Bernardo Bertolucci collaborated on the majority of their films with Sven Nikquist and Vittorio Storaro respectively, and the David Lean-Freddie Young and the Alfonso Cuarón-Emanuel Lubezski

partnerships demonstrate some of the most consequential director-cinematographer relationships in the medium.

In order to express the ideas and substance of the script effectively, cinematographers employ a range of tools that are central to their craft. The choice and use of this apparatus, or 'gear', is important to the successful communication of the director's vision. Despite recent developments in digital technologies that have multiplied the tools available to filmmakers and expanded visual and narrative possibilities, the fundamental elements of perspective, composition, light, shadow and colour, that create meaning in the image, remain the same. Briefly, these include: lenses that govern perspective, depth of field and angle of view; lights that define depth, atmosphere, colour and mood; filters to define diffusion, exposure (neutral density filters), focus (diopters and split diopters), colour balance, contrast and texture of the image; and finally, film stock and the subsequent laboratory processes that affect the grain, texture, contrast and saturation of the image. All of these elements are fundamental to the creation of meaning in a film.

Significantly, with the notable exceptions of lighting and composition, film scholars have tended to ignore these central facets when analysing film. Indeed, in the late 1970s and early 1980s there was a shift in film scholarship away from engagement with the image towards an increasing employment of theoretical models from a range of diverse academic disciplines. Together with the growing engagement with film by scholars in disciplines outside of traditional film studies, there was a change of direction and emphasis in discussions about film. The widening discourse on cinema resulted in a further shift of focus away from the essential visual nature and construction of film to a myriad of readings and interpretations. In short, over the past thirty years, the tendency has been for films to be looked *into* rather than looked *at* and the image literally overlooked in favour of what happens in it (Sobchack, 1979: 596-597). Figueroa's words in the epigraph not only point to the importance of the image, but also hint at the bias critics have had towards characterisation, structure and theme in relation to narrative and the way in which film theory

moved away from close visual analysis during the 1980s and 1990s in favour of other critical frameworks.

As this study centres on the work of a cinematographer, whose fundamental role is to construct cinematic images, it is essential to take Figueroa's cue and address this issue of looking *at* rather than looking *into* film images before discussing the specifics of his work. In order to look *at* images, it is essential to define the fundamentals of cinematography and the role of the cinematographer. The first section of this chapter provides, therefore, a brief summary of the tools and techniques available to the director of photography and his production role, with reference to Figueroa and some of the films on which he collaborated. This is followed by an overview of the ways in which scholars have tended to look *into* films and suggests why, paradoxically, there is an apparent blindness in film theory to the inherent visual nature of film. The summary definition and critique form the foundation on which I construct my study of Figueroa's work, which is a synthesis of two approaches, one that both acknowledges the visual quiddity of film and investigates it in relation to its cultural, political and economic contexts. That is, it is both a look *at* and look *into* the films.

### **The Lens and Perspective**

The camera is like the one-eyed man. It has no direct means of suggesting depth but only referential means like perspective and parallax movement. Unlike the eye, the camera lens has a fixed and narrow frame of vision. Unlike the eye, it often sees on a surface that is unresponsive to colour. Nevertheless, it is through the needle's eye of the camera that the director must funnel the impressions that he wants to convey.

(Spottiswoode, 1966: 40)

The main component of the camera is the lens. The choice of lens defines the angle of vision: the wider the angle of the lens, the wider the possible field. It is the eye of the director. However, even the widest angle lens does not have

the angle of vision that the human eye has. The eye has a 120° field of vision, which tapers off at the edges. A wide-angle lens, on the other hand, has only a 50° field, which cuts off sharply at the periphery of view. Moreover, the adjustment the brain makes to change our field of vision when we turn our head, does not happen on film. A mobile, wide-angle lens cannot compensate for the change in distance and angle and, therefore, on a wide lens, camera movements distort perspective, making lines that are parallel when static appear curved. In 35mm film (the format on which Figueroa worked, with the exception of some experimental films during the 1960s when he worked with a 16mm camera) the lens that approximates the spatial perception of the human eye is the 50mm. Significantly, Figueroa's preferred lenses were the wide-angle 24mm and 28mm, that were well outside of the 'normal' range (Figueroa Flores, 2002). His consistent use of wide-angle lenses was the basis of his cinematic signature style. Both lenses work outside of the rules of conventional perspective and Figueroa consciously developed a curvilinear perspective in his work that played alongside his use of rectilinear perspective. He described this process in an interview with Elena Feder:

The principle of rectilinear perspective is to guide the gaze to a particular point centered in the frame. Curvilinear perspective, on the other hand, works to split the eye between two distinct perspectival points of entry, joined by means of lines travelling along a curved plane within the frame. This increases the illusion of depth. In addition, the technical development of wide-angle lenses made it possible to add even more depth and content to a particular frame or scene.

(Feder, 1996: 8)

His inspiration for the application of curvilinear perspective was the work of Mexican painter Dr Atl (Gerardo Murillo), the experiments of his mentor cinematographer, Gregg Toland and the Spanish painter Diego Velázquez (Feder, 1996: 8). Although in 1934, Atl wrote that curvilinear perspective was 'antifotográfica' and that the standard camera lens as 'una parodia del ojo humano' could never present on screen the perspectives an artist could achieve on canvas, wide-angle motion picture lenses were already available and

cinematographers such as James Wong Howe were already experimenting with the different perspective the wide-angle allowed (Atl, 1934: 101). However, it was not until Figueroa, following the lead of Toland, began to experiment with 24mm and 28mm lenses and perspective (made more viable with the introduction of lens coatings during the 1940s), that Atl's aim of a new interpretation of nature was seen in Mexican film.<sup>3</sup>

Figueroa said that his images worked 'like a gothic cathedral' through the emphasis of vertical and diagonal dramatic composition in relation to curvilinear perspective (Greenhalgh, 2003: 105). Indeed, the wide-angle lens, in conjunction with appropriate lighting creates a gothic atmosphere. Figueroa's use of this combination of light and lens is especially apparent in his collaboration with Buñuel and its relation to German expressionist film and is discussed in Chapter Six.

Besides focal length, the other characteristic of a lens is its relative aperture, that is, the amount of light that enters the lens. The combination of the focal length and the aperture determines the 'speed' of the lens, that is, the amount of light needed for its optimum use. As a rule, a 'fast' lens requires less light than a 'slow' lens. In short, the lens determines the perspective and framing of what is in front of the camera.<sup>4</sup> The main advantage of the wide lenses that Figueroa used is that, at a given distance and f/stop, they provide greater depth of field. This means that figures and objects from the foreground to the background of frame are equally in focus. Combined with composition in depth, distance is exaggerated and allows for multiple action within the frame. Figueroa's use of compositional depth, with its diverse points of focus and distance was innovative and is central to my analysis of his films in subsequent chapters.

Further, the lens in relation to camera position defines the frame. Unlike painting (which is often referred to as analogous to the film image) or indeed photography, the film frame constantly changes:

It is not a passive container; it is an active signifier. Because the views within the frame are perpetually changing, perpetually shifting, the

frame's organization of those views is perpetually in the process of making new significations.

(Mast, 1984: 85)

Whether it is the action of characters, in and outside, entering and leaving the frame or the movement of the camera, with a pan, track, crane or dolly, the film frame transforms itself. Movement always has a purpose; whether to reveal something (about a character or place) to the audience, to motivate action or to add another layer of meaning to the narrative. It is the responsibility of the cinematographer that this constant change remains consistent to the atmosphere and meaning of the film. On close examination of his work, it is apparent that Figueroa is economic with camera movement. He uses pans, tracks and tilts only when they are essential to the meaning of a scene or to increase the narrative pace and conversely, he constructs scenes on static camera if it is appropriate to the overall theme of the film. For example, whereas *Salón México* (Emilio Fernández, 1948) is full of sensual tracks and slow pans across the dancers in the dancehall and the movements of the main characters, *The Fugitive* (John Ford, 1947) reflects the rigidity of the governing regime and the impasse with spirituality in long, static takes, filled with chiaroscuro lighting.

## Lighting

Light is to space, what music is to sound.

Adolphe Appia (Sears, 2003: 101)

Light and shadow guide our perception of space and are 'the most important, subtle and powerful tools of visual storytelling' (Brown, 2002: 166).

Lighting has developed hand in hand with changes in lenses and film stocks and the overall development throughout the twentieth century was towards 'fast' lenses and 'fast' film stocks that needed less light. The cinematographer's choice of lens and stock affects his choice and use of light and is intricately connected with the atmosphere and meaning of the scene and of the film as a

whole. Lighting technology changed over the course of Figueroa's career but essentially developed from six basic categories: HMIs; tungsten fresnels; tungsten open face lights; fluorescent; xenons and practicals (seen on set), each with its own specific properties.<sup>5</sup>

There is also, of course, natural light and, certainly, Figueroa used available light whenever possible. This was for economic and practical considerations as well as aesthetic reasons, as to light a studio set had very different criteria and costs than to set up lights or indeed, to use available light on location. For example, the location shots of *Los olvidados* (Buñuel, 1950), were taken in the middle of the day. Figueroa chose to shoot during the period of most intense sunlight to produce a flat, shadowless image, representative of the desolate physical and emotional environment of the film, whilst the interior scenes, shot in the studio, reflect the darker themes of the film with low lighting and contrasty images.<sup>6</sup> For *La perla* (Emilio Fernández, 1945), Figueroa elected to shoot the opening exterior scenes on a wide lens at dawn when the early morning sun created long shadows from the static villagers on the beach. The shots communicate the community's tense wait for a change in the sea conditions and their vulnerability in relation to the ocean. Conversely, in the interior scenes of the hut he uses a shorter lens and the lighting is diffuse, with little shadow, to capture the harmony of the main characters' home. Figueroa constantly experimented with the use of light in this way, correlating his choices of lens, film stock and filters as much in line with budgetary constraints as for aesthetic reasons, yet in this delicate balance between economics and aesthetic he never compromised the integrity of the image (Figueroa Flores, 2001).

## **Filters**

As Figueroa worked mainly in black and white, he used filters almost exclusively for diffusion and contrast control. Diffusion filters 'soften' the image and reduce contrast. Figueroa, however, often preferred to use thin, delicate textiles, such as silk stockings or linen gauze over the lens, particularly when he shot close-ups of female stars. His son remembers that his father



would frequent textile shops to see if there were new materials, silks, nets or voiles, that would serve as a diffuser (Figueroa Flores, 2003).

On the other hand, contrast filters essentially 'sharpen' the image. They work to lighten or darken the monochromatic rendering of certain colours in the subject. This introduces a difference in brightness between two colours which would otherwise reproduce in black and white as similar tones of grey. A coloured object will appear dark in a print if photographed through a filter which absorbs the colour of the light reflected from or transmitted through the object.<sup>7</sup> Figueroa worked with art directors to find the most appropriate colours in the sets and with make-up artists to find the best foundation and lip colours on the actors in order to improve the range of contrast. One of the most extreme examples was *Río Escondido* (Emilio Fernández, 1949), his most radical experiment with filters, where María Félix's lips were coloured brown and her face covered in heavy white pancake.

Filters eliminate unseen atmospheric haze and render a sharper image. They also decrease the amount of light entering the lens and therefore it is vital that the cinematographer calculate the amount of light falling onto the film in order to find the appropriate exposure. Some of Figueroa's most inventive cinematography is evident in his work with filters. The analysis of *Río Escondido* in Chapter Four includes details of how Figueroa innovated in the use of infra-red filters and laboratory techniques to achieve a striking style that encapsulates the extreme narrative themes and sub-text in the film.

### **Film Stock**

Film stock is the name given to the negative celluloid on which a film is shot. Figueroa's best-known images are in black and white and he was clear about his preference for it above colour. Black and white had for him 'una fuerza expresiva, una calidad onírica que la contundencia, el realismo del color, anula' (Issac, 1993: 71).

It was the introduction of Eastman Kodak Plus X in 1938, that had a decisive impact on the development of Figueroa's cinematography. Plus X gave the

image definition of the earlier, slower stocks and it quickly became the most favoured stock in Hollywood during the 1940s as it required less light in the studio and therefore dramatically cut the budget of films (Salt, 1992: 196). It had the added advantage that it allowed the option for the cinematographer to work on a smaller aperture to produce greater depth of field. This was an important factor in how Figueroa was able to develop his signature wide-angle, deep focus style and to aid his experiments in perspective. Although during the 1940s an increasing range of film stocks became available, they were mainly in colour. The only new black and white stock that appeared during the decade was the Dupont Superior II and III. Figueroa, like Toland, continued to shoot on Eastman Kodak Plus X and Super XX.

However, it is important to note that Figueroa did not have much say in his choice of film stock. With the advent of World War II in 1939, there was an embargo on stock from the German Agfa and it would have been very difficult to obtain French stocks like Dupont. Further, Figueroa was pivotal in securing an agreement with Kodak, organised by Nelson Rockefeller at the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (OCCIA), to supply raw film stock to Mexico (Figueroa 1988: 132). During the 1950s, Kodak produced Tri-X, a film which had greater latitude and could be used with even less light. However, Super XX continued to be the preferred stock of most feature cinematographers, including Figueroa and his colleagues. Assisted by the deal made with Figueroa during the war, Kodak dominated the Mexican market for the next three decades (Salt, 1992: 241).<sup>8</sup>

### **Laboratory Techniques**

It is in the laboratory that the latent image on an exposed film turns into a visible image through the processing and development of the negative on which the film has been shot, and where decisions on the final look of the film in terms of contrast, resolution, exposure and colour are made. Figueroa had a close relationship with laboratories and the technicians who worked with his footage and together they carried out rigorous light tests to find the optimum light at which to develop the negative.<sup>9</sup>

An example of how he experimented with processing and the good relationships he maintained with technicians, is apparent in an interview with Alberto Issac in which he describes a film he shot in Patagonia with Fernández, *La Tierra del Fuego se apaga* (1954):

El sol colgado a 45 grados. Había mucho viento y las nubes corrían a gran velocidad, dando una sombra cambiante que resultaba muy plástica, muy interesante. En ese momento establecí mi estrategia para la fotografía. Hice una transportación de gamas. La gama para el blanco y negro, en todo el mundo, era de 6.5. Yo hice una prueba de 400 pies de película y la envié al laboratorio en Buenos Aires, donde ya había hecho algunos ensayos y ya tenía amigos. Las instrucciones: 'Busquen gama 9.5 o 10 porque no tengo otra' [...] A los tres días recibí uno de los mensajes más satisfactorios de mi vida profesional: 'Gama 9.5 exacta. El suyo es el material de más calidad que ha pasado por este laboratorio.' Era la luz ideal.

(Issac, 1993: 112)

The gamma is the relationship between the overall contrast of the film and the variation in contrast between the original subject matter and the image reproduced. The change in the gamma ratio during processing enabled Figueroa to retain the blacks in the image whilst also obtaining a wide range of greys through to white. His attention to contrast through the manipulation in the laboratory, together with his use of filters, contributed to his films ranging from luminous gradations of a full range of black through greys to white, to high contrast black and white.

Having briefly described the tools of the cinematographer's trade, I will now outline how the working practices between the director of the film and the director of photography function and suggest reasons for the fundamental disregard of the cinematographer in film criticism and scholarship.

## The Director of Photography

Yo soy un artista, no soy un técnico, pero conozco la técnica  
suficientemente para poder desarrollar mi trabajo.

(Gabriel Figueroa, 1997)<sup>10</sup>

The cinematographer is also called the 'Director of Photography' (DoP/DP) or 'Lighting Cameraman/Camerawoman' in Britain, 'Chef Opérateur'/'Directeur de la Photographie' in France and 'Operator' in Eastern Europe, terms that have arisen from their specific industrial, cultural and historical contexts.<sup>11</sup> Figueroa always had a separate credit under *fotografía*. In the majority of films, his credit came immediately before the director's, and foregrounded him as central to the production process.

The cinematographer's relationship with the director is one of the central collaborations of the filmmaking process. Actual working practices vary enormously across different productions. Figueroa was, nevertheless, clear on how he saw the role of a cinematographer, 'Hay que plegarse a la idea del director al cien por ciento' (Meyer, 1976: 50). However, he also emphasised that the relationship was very much in a spirit of mutual collaboration, stating that 'el cine es un arte de conjunto' (Meyer, 1976: 48). With this attitude, he developed different working practices with each of the directors with whom he collaborated. For example, with Fernández, one of the key directors of the so-called 'Golden Age' and with whom he collaborated most, he was in complete control of the lighting, camera placement and movement (Issac, 1993: 31; Thoyer, 2000: 98; Poniatowska, 1996: 49-50). With the surrealist, émigré Buñuel, notorious for his lack of concern for photography, he concentrated on lighting, creating the atmosphere and mood of the films and perspective in the frame (Thoyer, 2000: 99; Meyer, 1976: 48). On the other hand, the internationally renowned US director Ford, like Fernández, gave Figueroa full control over the camera placement, movement and lighting (Meyer, 1976: 50; Thoyer, 2000: 98; Figueroa, 1988: 38-40).

Figuerola's filmography demonstrates a wide range of work with production values that vary from film to film and director to director. A large proportion of his filmography is made up of work on *churros*, quick turnaround films, many of which are comedies and which, despite being technically adequate, are not usually referred to in the same way as the more 'serious' films, which have become his trademark. What is more, it is important to bear in mind that Figuerola worked in a commercial industry that did not have the concept of 'art house' film we have today. The trajectory of the film industry throughout the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s and into the 1960s was an emphatically commercial enterprise. It was not until the late 1960s that Figuerola worked on more experimental productions, with the younger filmmakers of the *Nuevo Cine* group, which might now fit into the category of independent film.<sup>12</sup>

The finances of a production obviously affect the modes of working and equipment available to a cinematographer. However, a surprisingly small minority of productions in Figuerola's filmography would be categorised as big budget. He worked with relatively little need for expensive equipment, large lighting rigs or effects. What we see on the screen he achieved through simple techniques with the aim of creating an appropriate visual style for each narrative and of being the eye that channelled the director's vision.

It is clear, therefore, that the cinematographer plays a key role in the creative construction of a film. Yet, there is an apparent disregard for the work of the director of photography in both mainstream criticism and academic film studies. What were the reasons for the shift in criticism and scholarship from looking *at* the films to looking *into* them? A brief overview of how discussion of the image has evolved over the past fifty years reveals the subtle way in which the emphasis shifted, relatively early on in cinema studies, from the image to the narrative of film and to push the picture to the background.

## The Focus on Cinematography

In the exemplary *Making Pictures: A Century of European Cinematography*, the president of the European Confederation of Cinematographers (1992-1994), Luciano Tovoli, suggests that although recognition for cinematographers has been growing in recent years, their work is still described in generalities, rather than examined and discussed in meaningful terms (Sears, 2003: 7). As Vittorio Storaro comments in *American Cinematographer*, '[Critics] assume technology removes emotion, spirit, intelligence. If they wrote in an informed manner they could help us improve. Our best efforts are trivialised by ignorant evaluations, like "great scenery"' (Greenhalgh, 2003: 106). Both Tovoli and Storaro highlight the lack of critical engagement with cinematography by critics and scholars who have tended to concentrate on biographical details and anecdotes provided by cinematographers, rather than address the images and the processes that created them. One of the few writers who does engage critically with cinematography, and who has provided an important perspective from which I have formulated my own approach to the subject, is film scholar Cathy Greenhalgh. She acknowledges that, 'We have little idea how these moving images were materialised and the contributions of those who made them. The cinematographer is a key player in all this and yet his or her ideas and working processes still appear very mysterious' (Greenhalgh, 2003: 95). She goes on to suggest why critics fail to acknowledge and analyse the work of cinematographers:

What critics are unable to acknowledge, and therefore collude with, is the structure of a market and critique which keeps cinematographers from achieving proper recognition. In some countries a system of fees has been in operation. 'Above the Line' employees – the director, the producer, the artistes – can negotiate fees and percentages. Producers have succeeded in keeping cinematographers – as well as other key creative personnel and all crew – 'below the line'. This keeps those judged to be technicians, however highly regarded, in their place.

It is easy to see why cinematographers are reluctant to risk speaking about what may be perceived as the director's aesthetic territory, when their next job may be on the line.

(Greenhalgh, 2003: 146)

Certainly, in the contexts of Hollywood and the European film industries this may be the case. But why has the system of 'above the line' and 'below the line' evolved and what purpose does it serve? I would suggest that the division in production terms originates in the perceived relationship between a profit-making industry and the creative process, a relationship that is seen as a conflict between financial gain and artistic expression. Cinematographers, categorised as technicians and therefore 'below the line', have tended to be ignored within film criticism which has placed the centre of critical attention on the more evident 'above line' creative team of director, actors and producers.

One aspect of film theory that addresses the art/industry dichotomy is auteur theory. The fact that David Gerstner and Janet Staiger (2003) agreed to write individual introductions to their valuable anthology *Authorship and Film*, acknowledges the complex and contentious developments of the theory and the multiple critical approaches it has inspired. Yet, despite the detailed overview of notions of authorship covered by the various contributors to the book, a critical examination of the collaborative nature and workings of the production process is evaded, except in consideration of 'grassroots', i.e.: non-commercial, collective filmmaking practices. Therefore, although auteur theory questions the relationship of art and industry, in its assertion that specific directors could express themselves artistically within the industrial constraints of the film industry, be it Hollywood or non-US, it persists in its exclusive focus on the director, an 'above line' figure, as auteur. Finally, in proposing only a select number of directors within an industrial framework, auteur theory paradoxically reinforces the belief that the creation of art within a commercial infrastructure is, with few exceptions, untenable.

Edward Buscombe suggests that the distinction between 'above' and 'below' line roles has its roots in dominant social ideas around the relationship of art to industry:

One might suppose that a little common sense would tell us that such a distinction is nonsense, that all film is both industry *and* art, in some sense. Yet the proof that the mutual exclusion of art and industry operates at a level too deep to be affected by mere common sense can be found not only in the dominant critical attitudes but in the organisation of social institutions.

(Buscombe, 1995: 18)

He goes on to highlight that one of the main consequences of this split has been that film criticism has produced a rigid dichotomy between films and the processes that produce them. This has resulted in a tendency for film studies to concentrate on film content. Political, social and cultural contexts may be central to their analysis, but ultimately films are read as texts, representations of a society, with no consideration of how economic, technological and industrial practices contribute to and create meaning within the film. In other words, they are looked *into* rather than *at*.

Cinematography has a particularly ambiguous position in this widely accepted division. On one hand, it is a technical area, 'below the line' whilst, on the other hand, a cinematographer is central in creating the very images which are the fundamental basis of film criticism and analysis. An in-depth analysis of cinematography, therefore, suggests ways in which to reconcile this dichotomy and propose a more pragmatic position that avoids the perpetuation of the industry/art, technical/aesthetic divide.

Mike Cormack categorises studies on cinematic style into two groups, 'explanations based on individual creativity and explanations based on technological change' (1994: 1). In the first category, there are the explanations based on individual creativity, that is, anecdotal accounts of the



work and life of specific cinematographers with little reference to the specifics of the images they produced. In the second are detailed technical studies on the development of cinematographic equipment. However, Cormack's model may be extended to a third category, to include a small body of work which investigates the wider contexts and implications of image and technology and relates the development of cinematic style to economic and ideological forces. Indeed, Cormack's own study falls into this group.

In his first category, Cormack cites as examples, Charles Higham's 1970 book *Hollywood Cameramen* and Leonard Maltin's *The Art of the Cinematographer* (1971), which discuss the individual creativity of selected cinematographers. More recent examples of this type include *Cinematographers on the Art and Craft of Cinematography* (Anna Sterling, 1987), and *Contemporary Cinematographers on their Art* (Pauline Rogers, 1998). Although published nearly twenty years after Higham and Maltin, Sterling and Rogers employ the same concept and structure in their critique. Both publications are compilations of transcribed and edited interviews made up of personal anecdotes or explanations of how the featured cinematographer achieved a look or effect in a particular film. Poniatowska's *Una mirada que limpia* (1996) and Issac's *Conversaciones con Gabriel Figueroa* (1993) would fit into this category, although with considerably more emphasis on the anecdotal and biographical than on technical detail. Jack Cardiff's autobiographical *Magic Hour* (1996) also falls into this group, together with other publications authored by cinematographers, these include *Every Frame a Rembrandt* (Lazlo, 2000), and Nestor Almendros's classic text, *Man with a Camera* (1985).

Cormack's second category includes studies in which technological innovation and subsequent stylistic change are seen as part of an inevitable path of scientific progress and, therefore, are unrelated to the society in which they develop. *American Cinematographer*, the house journal of the American Society of Cinematographers, would be a good candidate for this category. Reports on lenses, stock and, throughout the last fifteen years, the developments in digital technologies are combined with interviews and reviews

of practising cinematographers and how they have incorporated these technological advances into their work. Barry Salt's books (1992 & 1976) extend *American Cinematographer's* remit and concentrate on providing detailed information on the development of lenses, stock and lighting. Salt proposes that this is the most appropriate approach to cinematography. He believes that technological developments are completely autonomous from their wider context and, 'as for ideology, its connection to film technology is practically zero' (Salt, 1976: 123).

Salt's comment highlights the dearth of critical thinking in relation to cinematographic practice and its development within a wider frame of reference. It relates to the work of the authors mentioned in the first category who construct their studies on the individual cinematographer and their development of a particular mode of working and style on an accepted assumption that the technology used is scientific and, therefore, ideologically neutral. As a result, these writers also place the creative process of the cinematographer outside of ideology, as if somehow they were immune to the political, economic and social context that surrounds them.

Although André Bazin (1967) and Patrick Ogle (1971) suggest a more complex view of technological progress, both critics see the principal motivation behind technical innovation in cinematography as an impulse towards greater realism.<sup>13</sup> As ideology defines notions of realism, (a fundamental point which neither Bazin nor Ogle acknowledges) their approach is ultimately in line with Salt. The more recent work of Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson (1985) in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, and Duncan Petrie's study of British cinematographers (1994) (which adopts their model of analysis) continue to avoid questions about why and when technological advances are made available and, most importantly, how cinematographers use them in their particular industrial and personal contexts.<sup>14</sup>

Consequently, there is no analysis of the ways in which ideology informs the development of film technology and the work of the cinematographer. It is as if the technical and creative processes that construct the screen image operate

within an ideological vacuum and as such bear no relation to the cultural, political and economic contexts that inform those processes.<sup>15</sup>

To be sure, the discussion of specific technical data and personal experience within these texts is an invaluable record of the craft and constant innovation of cinematography. As with anecdotal accounts of Figueroa's career and his autobiographical writings, they provide useful material on the way in which a cinematographer deals with particular challenges in his work. However, placing these details within wider ideological contexts deepens understanding of cinematography and transcends the inevitable mystification of the role of the cinematographer and the technology with which they work. Further, it opens up issues that surround the motives and impulses for innovation, how new technology is developed, by whom and to what ends and thereby avoids vague notions of natural development, practicality and individual creativity.

### **Ideology, Technology and Cinematography Interpreted**

Despite the ground-breaking work of theoreticians such as Brian Henderson, Jean-Louis Baudry, Jean Louis Comolli and Bill Nichols, who during the 1970s began to explore technology and cinematic style within ideological frameworks, the area remains relatively unexplored. This may be due to the concentration in film studies on the film text and the burgeoning dominance of psychoanalytical and cultural analysis during the 1980s. Comolli succinctly summarises the dominant view his contemporaries held on cinema, which could still apply today:<sup>16</sup>

Everything involved in the field of film technology – equipment, methods, standards, conventions – is vigorously defended from any ideological implications by a number of critics, filmmakers, and naturally, by the majority of technicians themselves. They'll agree (more or less) that film has a relationship to ideology on the level of themes, production (system of economic relations), distribution (interpretations) and even on the level of its realization (by the *metteur-en-scène*/subject) but never any in the area of the technical practices which *manufacture* film from beginning to end. They demand a place

apart for film technology, beyond ideologies, outside history, social movements and the construction of meanings. Film technique we are told is precisely that – a technique and neutral.

(Comolli, 1977: 128)

It is Comolli who points out the assumption that technology is neutral. Taking J.P. Lebel's work, *Cinema and Ideology*, as a starting point, Comolli emphasises that the development of technology is grounded in ideology. He stresses that, for example, the camera was produced on the assumption of the Quattrocento code of perspective exactly at a time when late nineteenth-century artists were beginning to question their relationship to this code. Yet, because the camera was 'scientifically' produced, the aesthetic and technical codes that governed its development were consequently seen as ideologically and aesthetically neutral.

Significantly, Comolli highlights the importance of not confining technical issues to the 'visible part of film technique (camera, shooting, crew, lights, screen)' to the exclusion of the 'invisible part (frame lines, chemistry, fixing and developing, baths and laboratory processing, negative, the cuts and joins of montage technique, soundtrack, projector etc...)'. He continues:

It is not clear, therefore, that what is happening at the moment on the level of practice should be reproduced on the level of theory: the reduction of the hidden part of the technique to its visible part carries the risk of reasserting the domination of the visible i.e.: *the ideology of the visible* (and what it implies, the masking and effacement of work).

(Comolli, 1977: 131)

Comolli's cry for a reassertion (but not dominance) of the visual in film theory and criticism is echoed in Henderson's notable essay 'Towards a Non-Bourgeois Camera Style' in which he examines camera style in Godard's film *Weekend* (1976). Henderson proposes that Godard's stylistic choices had intrinsic ideological consequences. He suggests that the decision to 'flatten' the image in *Weekend* was a conscious rejection of what he describes as 'bourgeois

world-view and self image' projected by composition in depth. Further, in his footnotes he proposes that composition in depth has an innate 'inexhaustible mystery'. Using Welles as an example, he suggests that the multiple viewpoints and perspectives in films such as *Citizen Kane* 'fail to yield certainty concerning the underlying questions'. Although I would question Henderson's assertion that deep focus is inherently bourgeois, his work is seminal as it is one of the few ideological readings of cinematography.<sup>17</sup>

Paradoxically, however, Henderson, in common with other critics and theorists of the period, continues to develop his theory in auteurist terms. Not once in his article is Godard's cinematographer, Raoul Coutard, mentioned nor, indeed, Welles's director of photography, Gregg Toland, nor is consideration given to their roles in the decision-making process. Although his auteurist assumptions limit Henderson's work as a complete paradigm, it is, nevertheless, a valuable reference point from which to embark upon a critical study of the work of a cinematographer and the function of cinematography in the creation of meaning in a film.

In a more general extension of Henderson's approach, Bill Nichols gives an astute appraisal of how images serve ideology:

Representations must be made to appear to be other than what they are. Above all, they must appear to lack these very contradictions that informed their production. They must appear as signs of eternal values: harmony, wholeness, radiance, a natural and ideal world spun from the representations of an existing social order.

(Nichols, 1981: 290)

Nichols's words resonate with the iconic status Figueroa and his images hold and suggest that on closer examination, their perceived luminosity, balance and perfection actually reveals fissures within the film text, the very contradictions that Nichols suggests are hidden beneath the surface of every image.

## Conclusion

Given the above evidence of how central a cinematographer's contribution is to a production, it is remarkable that their work is overlooked in mainstream culture and in film scholarship. Greenhalgh writes an unprecedented account of the lack of attention directed to cinematographers and I shall draw some of the points from her essay, together with my own observations, to briefly summarise the reasons as to why this situation has come about (Greenhalgh, 2003: 155).

The very nature of the director-cinematographer collaboration can confuse what critics and theorists interpret as the director's and cinematographer's respective input to a film, a confusion that is augmented by the number of names used to describe a cinematographer. Although cinematographers often have larger filmographies than directors (compare, for example, Figueroa's 224 films to Fernández's 38 films), they are only usually given artistic recognition in conjunction with a particular director which, combined with the pervasiveness of auteur theory, has merely compounded the lack of acknowledgement of cinematography.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the tendency for scholars to look *into* films rather than *at* them has consequently led to a lack of engagement with the construction of the image and in the film industry, cinematographers as 'below line' technicians are frequently not adequately credited for their artistic input. Further, that critics and scholars rarely understand the real practice of filmmaking results in limited critical approaches to film and the few cinematographers who have written about their work in detail err towards the anecdotal rather than a critical discussion of the more technical and creative aspects of their work. Finally, the ubiquitous dominance of Hollywood in film studies, which has seriously limited a full appraisal of international cinematographic practices, is supported by the lack of distribution for non-Hollywood films which are rarely seen outside of festivals or in short runs at art house cinemas.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, many critics and scholars are simply not aware that there may be cinematic practices that have developed and continue to flourish outside of the narrow limitations of the US industrial model.

The aim in the chapters that follow is to reposition Figueroa as a giver of meaning within the filmmaking process. The objective is not to position the cinematographer, in this case Figueroa, as an alternative auteur, but rather to acknowledge the collaborative nature of film production, in particular the relationship between the cinematographer, the director and the production of the film text. Further, my intention is to bridge the gap that has occurred between writing on film and looking at it, in order to reposition the image as central to film scholarship. My approach requires an acknowledgement of Figueroa within specific industrial, political and cultural histories and of how his role as cinematographer functioned in relation to film production and to society. As mentioned in the introduction, analysis of Gabriel Figueroa is complicated, as to merely deconstruct his status would, paradoxically, only add to the myth that already exists. Therefore, this study analyses the construction of the images he produced and negotiates the mythology that has come to surround the cinematographer and his work, to expose the rifts and fissures within the ideological construction and use of both the images that became so fundamental to the national imaginary of Mexico and the man who created them.

The following chapter addresses the nature of the cinematographer-director collaboration and its limitations. Specifically, it examines how Figueroa's work has come to be viewed, almost exclusively, in terms of his partnership with director Emilio Fernández; how this has obscured appreciation of Figueroa's work and how critical frameworks over the past forty years that look *into* the films that he shot have suppressed the fundamental act of looking *at* what he projected onto the screen.

---

<sup>1</sup> Figueroa cited in Feder (1996: 7).

<sup>2</sup> From the ASC's Position Paper on the ASC website:  
<http://www.cinematographer.com/ascP.htm>. (Accessed 5 May, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> Charles Ramírez Berg makes a detailed analysis of Figueroa's use of the curvilinear in what he calls 'oblique perspective' (Ramírez Berg, 1994: 19). Indeed, Ramírez Berg is the only scholar who has made a visual analysis of Figueroa's work and his ground-breaking essays (1992;1994) are invaluable. However, the cultural and ideological assumptions from which he

---

draws his conclusions are problematic. Such is the importance of Ramírez Berg's work and its relation to this study that there is a detailed analysis of his essays in Chapter Two.

<sup>4</sup> There are many manuals on the technical properties and specifications of the lens, camera, lights, stock and laboratory techniques, many of them highly technical. However, Barry Salt (1976a and 1992) and Raymond Spottiswoode (1966) provide simple, lucid definitions and explanations of film equipment and processes.

<sup>5</sup> See Brown (2001: 142-156) for a detailed yet succinct specification of lighting equipment. For the historical development of lights see Salt (1983).

<sup>6</sup> There is a detailed analysis of *Los olvidados* and Figueroa's collaboration with Buñuel in Chapter Six.

<sup>7</sup> Filter colours: RED: absorbs blue and green/ transmits red, GREEN: absorbs red and blue/absorbs green, BLUE: absorbs green and red/transmits blue, CYAN: absorbs red/transmits blue and green=cyan, MAGENTA: absorbs green/transmits red and blue=magenta, YELLOW absorbs blue/transmits green and red=yellow.

<sup>8</sup> It is somewhat ironic that the US Kodak Plus X and Super XX became the fundamental material upon which Figueroa imprinted his nationally iconic images of Mexico. Such transnational paradoxes are exposed in the following chapters.

<sup>9</sup> In the 1990s he selected frames from the hundreds of light tests he had in his archive to turn into stills, digitally produced by his son Gabriel Figueroa Flores.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Malú Huacuja del Toro.

<sup>11</sup> See Cathy Greenhalgh (2003: 131-143) for an enlightening account of the cultural differences within European filmmaking practices and the relationship of director and cinematographer.

<sup>12</sup> The *Nuevo Cine* group was formed from young intellectuals, writers and filmmakers, among them José de la Colina, Carlos Monsiváis, J.M. García Ascot, Rafael Corkidi, Salvador Elizondo, Alberto Issac, Paul Leduc and Fernando Macotela and Emilio García Riera. Many became the most important filmmakers and critics of their generation. Others related to the group included Carlos Fuentes and Gabriel García Márquez. The group produced a manifesto that called for greater transparency and access into the film industry, freedom of expression and exposed pressures of censorship. They demanded a film school be established and made an attempt to introduce serious film criticism into Mexico in the form of the journal *Nuevo Cine*. The journal based itself within auteurist theory and took André Bazin's work as its critical paradigm. The group viewed Buñuel as innovative and opening new directions for Mexican cinema. For a discussion of *Nuevo Cine* see Pérez Turrent (1995: 94-115) and Ramírez Berg (1992: 46-50).

<sup>13</sup> For a detailed account of Bazin and Ogle, see Cormack (1994: 4-5).

<sup>14</sup> In *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* the authors (Bordwell et al) limit explanation to a combinations of one of three factors; 1) production efficiency 2) product differentiation and 3) adherence to standards of quality. The third of these categories causes particular problems. As



---

examples of such standards the authors cite 'progress toward better storytelling, greater realism, and enhanced spectacle'. When these vague, evaluative phrases are unpacked it becomes clear that they are seen in a near-Bazinian sense of an evolutionary movement towards an ideal of cinematic expression. The central tenet of Bordwell, Thompson and Staiger reveals the inconsistency of their approach. The 'classical stylistic paradigm' of Hollywood, they describe as consistent from 1917-60, through the continuity of narrative logic, cinematic time and space, which are unchanging. This, however, reduces style to 'underlying abstract systems of narrative, time and space' deflecting attention 'away from the surface of the text and so the significance at this level is missed' (Cormack, 1994: 5).

<sup>15</sup> In his conclusion to *Cinema and Technology, Image, Sound, Colour* (1985: 160) Steve Neale states, 'I have tried to develop a counter approach, one in which a series of technological events and innovations are located within a variety of contexts: aesthetic, ideological and economic as well as scientific and technical. Technology in the cinema is reducible to none of these factors singly. It is instead a complex product of all of them'. Paradoxically, Neale's book follows the conventional path of viewing technology in chronological terms and ideological analysis is not explicit. Neither is there an explicit explanation in his writing of the implicit link between aesthetics and ideology.

<sup>16</sup> A comparatively recent exception is Brian Winston's excellent book, *Technologies of Seeing* (1996) in which he analyses the ideological and aesthetic forces central to the historical development of film and television.

<sup>17</sup> My contention lies in the ambiguity Henderson perceives as intrinsic to a deep focus image which I would contend can also open up uncertainty which undermines any fixed viewpoint, cinematic or ideological.

<sup>18</sup> The issue of a cinematographer being linked exclusively to one director is fully addressed in Chapter Two.

<sup>19</sup> This dominance led to, and is perpetuated by, the wide acceptance of the 'classical Hollywood style' as set out by Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson in the 1980s. A critique of the notion of classical Hollywood style follows in Chapter Two.

## Chapter Two

### **Inventing Mexico: Going Beyond the 'Fernández-Figueroa Style'**

Despite a filmography that numbers more than two hundred productions, Figueroa's cinematographic style has become synonymous with the twenty-four films he shot with director Emilio Fernández.<sup>1</sup> Their thirteen-year collaboration between 1943 and 1956 was highly successful in terms of both box office receipts and critical acclaim. While it is apparent that Figueroa's collaboration with Fernández produced some of the cinematographer's most significant work, the tendency for scholars and critics to study those films alone has functioned to diminish Figueroa's overall achievements as a director of photography. Moreover, the attention placed on the collaboration with Fernández has concealed the importance of Figueroa's work with a range of other Mexican directors over the forty-seven years of his career.

As discussed in the introduction, Figueroa's association with Fernández, together with the public prestige and the widespread recognition he enjoyed as a union leader and civic negotiator, established him as an iconic figure in Mexico.<sup>2</sup> This status as an icon and the aura of mysticism that surrounds his work makes a thorough and objective analysis of his work a challenge. This is not to say that Figueroa has not been subject to critical attention. However, despite the several publications dedicated to his life and work, the only serious examination of his cinematography to date are two essays written by US film scholar Charles Ramírez Berg: 'Figueroa's Skies and Oblique Perspective, Notes on the Development of the Classical Mexican Style' (1992) and 'The Cinematic Invention of Mexico: The Poetics and Politics of the Fernández-Figueroa Style' (1994).<sup>3</sup>

Whilst Ramírez Berg's essays have much to recommend them, not least because they are the only critical studies on Figueroa to date, a close examination of the articles reveals the limitations in his argument and, in so doing, suggests the parameters for a more comprehensive study of Figueroa's contribution to

cinematography. An appraisal of the essays exposes assumptions that the writer makes about Figueroa's cinematography in relation to the notion of *mexicanidad* and also leads to a reconsideration of the way in which Ramírez Berg adapts the classical Hollywood paradigm of film style and his formulation of Mexican 'classical style'. Moreover, to go beyond the limitations of the 'Fernández-Figueroa style' paradigm and take a transnational approach, as opposed to the national bias of Ramírez Berg's analysis, provides an insight into the cinematographer's collaborations with other directors and the production contexts in which he worked.<sup>4</sup> As a result, the complex set of values and issues embodied in Figueroa's images begin to come into focus.

Following a detailed critique of Ramírez Berg's essays, I draw on the work of historian Seth Fein and film scholar Ana López as a basis from which I examine Figueroa's relationship to Hollywood and how the transnational is an inherent part of his work. Primary sources from files kept on Figueroa by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) provide empirical evidence of the complex transnational politics that surrounded the cinematographer and the Mexican film industry. The files, read in the light of Figueroa's exposure to, and adoption of, approaches pioneered by the left-wing German expressionist filmmakers that filtered through to Figueroa via his apprenticeship with US cinematographer Gregg Toland (who also had an ambiguous relationship to Hollywood) reveal the wide range of effects and, indeed, pressures that circumscribed Figueroa's development and work. As a result, the inherent assumptions in analyses such as Ramírez Berg's are re-evaluated and lead to a more in-depth appreciation of the transnational political and economic complexities that shaped Mexican cinema and determined its ambiguous relationships with post-revolutionary nationalist ideology and Hollywood.

### **Ramírez Berg's Oblique Perspective**

In his two articles Ramírez Berg identifies what he calls the 'Fernández-Figueroa style'. He links this style intrinsically to the nationalist notion of *mexicanidad*, a term that he (and indeed other scholars) employs uncritically and, as I shall show, does not define adequately. He structures his study of the

'Fernández-Figueroa style' around analysis of depth of field, mise-en-scène, camera angles, framing and composition in single shots taken from *María Candelaria* (1944), *La malquerida* (1949) and *Río Escondido* (1948). He also makes a detailed examination of curvilinear perspective which he categorises as one of the 'principal elements of the Fernández-Figueroa nationalist cinematic style' (Ramírez Berg, 1993: 35; 1994: 19). Composition in depth, complex mise-en-scène, low-angle set ups, framing with foreground figures and the use of a system of dialectical composition are the other main indicators of the style. These stylistic elements, Ramírez Berg argues, are a combination of and elaboration upon artistic influences from the Mexican printmaker José Guadalupe Posada and painters Dr Atl, José Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros. For cinematic precedents he cites Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein and his cinematographer Eduard Tisse's unfinished film *¡Que viva Mexico!* (1930); US photographer/cinematographer Paul Strand's work on *Redes* (1932) and briefly refers to US cinematographer Gregg Toland together with US directors Orson Welles and John Ford.

Ramírez Berg's second essay, 'The Cinematic Invention of Mexico: The Poetics and Politics of the Fernández-Figueroa Style' is, in fact, a reworking of the earlier 1992 article. The former appeared in the journal *The Spectator* and the latter as an essay in *The Mexican Cinema Project* (Noriega and Ricci: 1994). The re-publication of the essay in the Noriega-Ricci collection demonstrates the authority that Ramírez Berg's analysis of Figueroa's work carries in US-Mexican film scholarship. It is also noteworthy that the significant change in the title from the first publication is symptomatic of subtle changes in emphasis between the two texts. In the 1992 version, Ramírez Berg features Figueroa independently in the title yet in the main body of the text, his work is assimilated into what he calls the 'Fernández-Figueroa Style', which he proceeds to argue in terms of a classical cinematic aesthetic. In the 1994 version, however, the collaboration of Fernández with Figueroa is made prominent and the essay shifts emphasis to focus on the relation of style to politics and national identity. The later commentary also omits the historical background, which forms a major part of the introductory section in the 1992

version, and the definition and use of the notion of *mexicanidad* is absent, replaced by *lo mexicano*. Further, rather than present a discussion on aesthetic influences under separate headings, the later article is stylistically more fluid and integrates the aesthetic influences on Figueroa and Fernández into one longer section entitled 'The Roots of the Fernández-Figueroa Style'.<sup>5</sup>

Certainly, the two essays provide a valuable starting point for discussion of Figueroa's contribution to Mexican cinema. Notably, unlike many other commentators on Figueroa, Ramírez Berg engages with the essential visual construction of the image. That is, he foregrounds the importance of cinematography to propose an examination of it in relation to ideology and the cinematic representation of national identity. He develops his discussion through a detailed study of two fundamental elements of camera work: composition and perspective. His comments on curvilinear perspective are particularly incisive and the stills and diagrams used to illustrate his argument enlightening. In both articles, Ramírez Berg makes a case for the foundation of the Figueroa-Fernández cinematic style in relation to Eisenstein, Tisse, Strand, Toland, Welles and Ford, together with a consideration of the influence of Mexican artistic antecedents, namely Posada, Siqueiros, Rivera, Orozco and the Taller de Gráfica Popular. Although not original, the compilation of these influences provides a useful overview of the parameters of the critique that surrounds their work.<sup>6</sup>

However, despite the groundbreaking contribution to the critical appreciation of Figueroa's cinematography that Ramírez Berg's work represents, it is timely to examine the assumptions that form the basis of his argument in order to go beyond the 'Fernández-Figueroa style'. First, Ramírez Berg's conflation of Figueroa and Fernández with regard to visual style restricts analysis of Figueroa to his work with Fernández. This significantly excludes comparative analysis of Figueroa's work with other directors (and indeed Fernández's work with other cinematographers) in the period 1943-1956. Second, Ramírez Berg's uncritical adoption of notions of *la época de oro*, *mexicanidad* and *lo mexicano* and his subsequent amalgamation of these concepts with the classical paradigm

is problematic and has ramifications for his conjectures concerning the ideology of composition and perspective.

### **The Fernández-Figueroa Conflation<sup>7</sup>**

The fundamental problem in Ramírez Berg's analysis is the equal importance granted to Fernández in terms of the visual construction of images. Indeed, despite the prominence of Figueroa in the title of the earlier article, 'Figueroa's Skies and Oblique Perspective, Notes on the Development of the Classical Mexican Style', from the first few lines of the article, Ramírez Berg links the cinematographer with Fernández in the creation of what he calls the 'classical Mexican style'. In fact, throughout his collaboration with Fernández, Figueroa had sole responsibility for decisions on camera position, composition, lighting and the use of filters. Figueroa described his working practices with Fernández as an agreement between them that he, as director of photography, created the visual style of the films (Thoyer, 2001: 98; Issac, 1993: 30). Fernández worked with the actors and editors and gave complete control to Figueroa for the composition, lighting and set up of shots. As Ramírez Berg specifically defines visual style in terms of composition and perspective, the areas for which Figueroa was solely responsible, his subsequent conflation of the two filmmakers' work into the Fernández-Figueroa paradigm is, therefore, problematic.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, to concentrate attention on one collaboration at one specific point in their careers ultimately excludes more diverse representations of Mexico that Figueroa and Fernández produced with different collaborators and which are apparent in the visual style of those other films. Figueroa may have shot twenty-four films with Fernández, but he also shot seventeen with Miguel Delgado over a thirty-year period (1940-1970), eleven with Tito Davison over a twenty-nine year period (1948-1977), ten with de Fuentes (1935-1940) and seven with Buñuel (1950-1964). He collaborated with all of these directors and others, in particular, Julio Bracho, Ismael Rodríguez, Alejandro Galindo and Roberto Gavaldón, before, during and after the period in which he worked with Fernández.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the films directed by Buñuel, Davison and Rodríguez

overtly question the social and moral mores of the middle and ruling classes and the consequent position of the dispossessed within the structure of Mexican society. This is not to say that the films Figueroa shot with Fernández did not deal with the conflicts of class, race and sexuality, but the conflicts are, in general, resolved on a narrative level and the fissures apparent only on closer examination of, significantly, Figueroa's cinematography.

### *La época de oro*

Not only does Ramírez Berg conflate Figueroa and Fernández but he also situates them as central to the so-called *época de oro* of Mexican cinema. The dates for the *época de oro* are as indeterminate as the concept itself, but Ramírez Berg situates it as 1936-1956.<sup>10</sup> Although film production flourished by Latin American standards throughout the period, this 'Golden Age' was in great part due to foreign, particularly US, investment in the industry and the country as a whole (García Riera, 1988: 120). Significantly, although Ramírez Berg mentions the dependence of the Mexican industry on Hollywood in the first version of his article, it is absent in the republished essay. In both versions, he suggests that 'during the Golden Age, the disavowal of Hollywood's influences and the quest for Mexican roots reached its apotheosis in the films of Emilio 'El Indio' Fernández and cinematographer Gabriel Figueroa' (Ramírez Berg, 1994: 13). However, this 'disavowal' is complex and certainly goes beyond a 'tension between the adherence to the Hollywood paradigm and a rejection of it' (Ramírez Berg, 1994: 13). In his adoption of the nostalgic *época de oro*, Ramírez Berg avoids addressing the extent of the economic, political and cultural relationships between Mexico and the US. As a result, he fails to reveal how nationalist content and style in film production and the construction of concepts, such as the 'Golden Age', functioned as much to conceal US transnational intervention and Mexico's collaboration with it, as to boost national consciousness (Fein, 2000: 82-83). In so doing, Ramírez Berg, in common with other scholars, becomes complicit with the perpetuation of an inherently amorphous, nostalgic concept. Rather than address the political and economic issues specific to the four decades that followed the Revolution and that reached a height of labyrinthine complexity between the late 1930s and late

1950s, many scholars employ the term Golden Age or *época de oro*. As is the case with Ramírez Berg, they consequently avoid the inherent contradictions that arose between overt nationalist ideology, transnational political and economic relations with the US and the drive to modernity. Instead, they situate their arguments within a conveniently nebulous historical period, redolent with misleading nostalgia for a Mexico that is seen to have a clear sense of its own *mexicanidad*, situated in a stable and progressive nation state.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Mexicanidad/lo mexicano* and Classical Cinematic Style**

Integral to Ramírez Berg's vision of the *época de oro* is a notion of *mexicanidad* /*lo mexicano*. The terms are fundamental to post-revolutionary, nationalist rhetoric and continue to resonate with a concept of Mexico as 'deep' and 'labyrinthine' as set out by Octavio Paz in his seminal study (1950) and more recently by Carlos Bonfil Batalla (1996). They, among other *pensadores*, have described and defined Mexican culture through highly personal insights which, although persuasive, cloud empirically-based analysis (as opposed to subjective opinion) around national culture (Lomnitz, 1992: 88).<sup>12</sup>

The project to define the national character predates the revolution and is evident from colonial times in the form of incipient Creole nationalism. However, the rapid shifts in political and economic power in the post-revolution period made the union of race, class and culture within a coherent national identity imperative in order to promote and maintain social and political cohesion. The definition of race and its relation to class and power is not only central to notions of Mexicanity, but also the main cause of the profound contradictions that occurred in attempts to formulate a homogeneous Mexican national identity. Therefore, when one examines 'such quasi-metaphysical terms' as *mexicanidad*, *lo mexicano* and *mexicanismo* to analyse the political contexts in which they were and continue to be employed, what emerges is an amorphous image of a politically and culturally independent Mexico (Knight, 1992: 99). In reality, these vague terms, with their undefined and imaginary Mexico, work together with ideas such as the *época de oro* to



mask and passively support ruling elites and transnational intervention in Mexican politics, economics and culture.<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, Ramírez Berg's declared aim in his articles on Fernández and Figueroa to reveal the ideologies implicit in the work of the two filmmakers is paradoxically compromised by his non-discriminatory acceptance and lack of critical engagement with these terms. As a result, he positions himself within the parameters of post-revolutionary nationalism and consequently prevents objective analysis of the inherent contradictions in that ideology and its ambiguous relationship to a transnational agenda.

Central to *mexicanidad* and *la época de oro* is Ramírez Berg's argument that the Fernández-Figueroa cinematic invention of Mexico developed the blueprint for a Mexican classical visual style (Ramírez Berg: 1994). He foregrounds this in the subtitle of his 1992 essay, 'Notes on the Development of the *Classical* Mexican Style' (my emphasis). Paradoxically, in this first version of his thesis on Fernández-Figueroa, he does not define his understanding of the term classical. However, in the reworked essay of 1994, his interpretation of the term is made clear, stating that Fernández-Figueroa adapted the classical Hollywood paradigm whilst they drew on other international sources in order to create a distinct Mexican cinematic aesthetic.

There are three areas to examine here. First, Ramírez Berg's understanding of Hollywood classical style, second his conflation of a classical Mexican cinematic aesthetic with the Fernández-Figueroa style during the *época de oro* and finally his evocation of the term classical in relation to Mexican cinema. These points then prompt the questions, why does Ramírez Berg invoke a classical style for Mexican cinema and what is at issue?

Ramírez Berg takes as his model the definition of classical Hollywood style proposed by David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson in their seminal book on the subject. Published in 1985, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* proposes a formal organisation of principles that nominates US west

coast filmmaking as cinema's central stylistic paradigm. In so doing, it positions Hollywood as the progenitor of the commercial cinematic aesthetic and the determinant in the organisation of film industries worldwide. Ramírez Berg identifies three key components as fundamental to the Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson model: narrative structure formulated on Aristotelian conventions of logic and cause and effect; the establishment of cinematic time; and a spatial organisation with composition that privileges human figures in the film frame. A fourth element that he focuses on in detail later in the article is Hollywood's adherence to Renaissance systems of linear perspective. He goes on to argue that the nascent Mexican film industry not only imitated Hollywood's signifying practices, but also its industrial mode of production. He then proposes that Fernández and Figueroa simultaneously assimilated and rejected Hollywood and other international influences in pursuit of a distinctive national visual aesthetic (Ramírez Berg, 1994: 13). Ramírez Berg subsequently argues that the filmmakers' rejection of Hollywood's 'classical' tenets of composition and perspective established the basis for an alternative, Mexican classicism.

Ramírez Berg's deployment of Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson's paradigm is, however, problematic. To define Hollywood as a classical paradigm transforms it into a universal model and in so doing situates it outside of its specific political and economic contexts. As a result, analysis of any non-Hollywood film becomes an inventory of assimilation and rejection of the constructed, monolithic paradigm that is Hollywood. Ramírez Berg, develops his thesis on Fernandez-Figueroa precisely in this way, consequently reinforcing the hegemony of Hollywood and preventing analysis into the transnational social, historical and political complexities of the Fernández-Figueroa films.

In an enlightened critique, Christopher Williams throws Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson's assumption of classicism into question by bringing to the fore the oppressive limitations their paradigm places on analysis of Hollywood films. He also questions the authors' 'unconvincing attempts' to justify the label of classical which has the effect of crushing the diversity and complexity of

Hollywood production into 'crude and misleading' reductionism (Williams, 2000: 213-214). Likewise, in dubbing Fernández and Figueroa's work as 'classical', Ramírez Berg establishes a set of aesthetic rules that evoke a Mexican classical style against which all Mexican production is evaluated. Further, he unequivocally conflates classical Mexican style with Figueroa's cinematography. Yet, there is no discussion as to why Figueroa's work during the relatively short period of 1943-1956 should act as the classical benchmark. Moreover, although in the reworked essay Figueroa's status as progenitor of the classical style is not expressed as explicitly as it is in the 1992 version, it pervades the text as an unquestioned assumption.

In addition, Ramírez Berg's concentration on the Fernández-Figueroa collaboration locates the classical paradigm within the chronologically variable parameters of the so-called *época de oro*. His lack of critical engagement with the term *época de oro* consequently situates Mexican classicism within a perceived halcyon period of national cinema. The conflation of notions such as *época de oro* and classicism conveniently supports the concept of a stable, idyllic, creatively vibrant period in Mexican film and the idea that the apex of cinematic achievement could only flourish in such a propitious, bygone historical moment. As a result, the integration of Fernández-Figueroa/classical/*época de oro* forms a one-sided paradigm that restricts analysis of the widely diverse nature of Mexican filmmaking and the work of other filmmakers, not only in periods outside of the prescribed *época de oro* but also within it. Moreover, it confines analysis of the professional development of Figueroa and Fernández as filmmakers to a thirteen-year period and one creative partnership.

There is, however, more at stake in the formulation of a classical paradigm for Mexican cinema. Despite Ramírez Berg's stated awareness of the 'ethnocentric trap of positing Hollywood cinema as a formal ideal to which Mexican cinema was obliged to conform in order to earn legitimacy' (Ramírez Berg, 2000: 11), in his adaptation of the Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson model, he paradoxically falls into the very trap he seeks to avoid. Consequently, he validates and

legitimises Mexican film production through a classical visual heritage. Nevertheless, there is a fundamental difference between Hollywood's construction of classicism as universal - and consequently, nationally neutral - and the way in which Ramírez Berg intrinsically links Mexican classical style to its national specificity through the concept of *mexicanidad* (López, 1999: 423). It is precisely this uncritical adoption of nationalist rhetoric and the ideas it represents that confines Ramírez Berg's thesis. In his definition of a classical cinematic style in terms of its intrinsic Mexican-ness, during one of the key historical periods of nationalist sentiment, he ultimately seeks not only to legitimise the early Mexican film industry, but also to validate a nationally-specific, independent cinematic aesthetic. As a result, he restricts investigation into a range of visual styles employed by a variety of Mexican filmmakers. In turn, this limitation of vision hinders an examination of the relationship between a cinematic aesthetic and its wider social, political and historical contexts.

How, though, might this be achieved? One alternative approach that transcends the narrow constraints of the nationalist formula, as advocated by Ramírez Berg, is to engage with recent readings of Mexican cinema and film production that take a transnational perspective.

### **Transiting the National**

Ideas of the transnational are not new in the academic sphere. According to historian Seth Fein (2003), transnational thought dates back to the beginning of the last century with the work of Herbert Eugene Bolton.<sup>14</sup> Recent scholarship, Fein argues, is more interactive than comparative, resulting in the transformation of traditional absolutist notions of cultural imperialism and cultural nationalism into 'contact zones', those 'social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination' (Pratt, 1992: 4).

Using Pratt's paradigm in his own work on Mexican cinema between 1930 and 1960, Fein suggests that the Mexican film industry replicated the extensive

transnational interaction between the United States and Mexico.<sup>15</sup> Mexican cinema developed through what he describes as a system of collaboration, convergence and competition, but not confrontation, with the US industry and US foreign policy. Although Mexico's film industry grew into a national cinema it was not, contrary to many critics' interpretations, nationalist. Despite its anti-US rhetoric, Mexico's position, although antagonistic, has consistently protected the *relación especial* with the US, even if it has been at the expense of a chronic imbalance of trade between the two countries which has had serious consequences for Mexico's economy.<sup>16</sup>

Ana López also acknowledges the US cinema's ubiquitous, international presence and the challenge producers have had outside of the US in 'facing up' to Hollywood (Lopez, 2000: 419-437). When, in the post-war era, Hollywood came to represent US cultural imperialism, many Latin American producers rejected its practices in the interests of national cultural specificity. However, in the context of new economic and cultural exchanges, there is a reconsideration of this image of cultural colonisation that has 'opened up a space for rethinking the strategies through which Hollywood needs to be 'faced' and the histories of world cinema' (López, 1999: 419-420). López suggests an alternative forum in which to address the apparent showdown between Hollywood and its others. She proposes the establishment of a wide-ranging debate around culture and economic relationships which examines the links between the national and transnational processes and how the fissures and contradictions they create may be revealed and understood (1999: 435).

The work of Fein and López provides a useful paradigm within which to consider Figueroa's work and his status as one of the major protagonists in the Mexican film industry. The brief overview that follows provides the contexts in which Figueroa operated and facilitates a consideration of Figueroa's place in the development of Mexican cinematic aesthetic from a transnational perspective, as opposed to the nationalist standpoint proposed by Ramírez Berg.

## **Transnational Contexts**

Both López and Fein open up a broad area of debate in their examination of how Hollywood, in intimate alliance with the US state department, developed economic and political strategies to strengthen its hold on markets abroad, particularly in Latin America. This it did through the establishment of the trade association, the Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) in the 1920s, which strictly regulated imports of non-US films and controlled exports of Hollywood films abroad through its offshoot the Motion Picture Export Association of America (MPEAA). Its work was mainly to curtail quota legislation placed on US films by foreign governments and ensure Hollywood's place as the dominant product in the cinemas, although 'mutual' agreements were often enforced by foreign governments threatening boycotts and distribution embargoes.

There had always been a US presence within the early Mexican film industry, but its direct intervention accelerated in the late 1930s (at the time Cárdenas was busily nationalising the petrochemical industry and railways) with a series of Radio Keith Orpheum (RKO) co-productions, which used Mexican facilities and actors to make films for the Spanish language market. By 1940, well before the US entered the war, a more overtly political intercession was evident, with the formation of the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (OCIAA) under the leadership of Nelson Rockefeller. The Office, directed by Francis Alstock of the Motion Picture Division (MPD) and headed by John Hay Whitney, would supply not only equipment but also production funds and training to Mexican filmmakers.<sup>17</sup> The Office had close links with the Motion Picture Society of the Americas, (MPSA) who advised the studios on matters related to Latin America.<sup>18</sup>

In the interest of maintaining its close relationship with Washington, Hollywood mobilized to expand a competitive national industry that previously it had sought to undermine. In selling his agency's plan to the US studios, the MPD's Alstock believed that wartime assistance was not at odds with the US

industry's long term interests, because it would spread film culture to new markets that US producers would naturally dominate after the war.

(Fein, 2001: 169)

It was clear that owing to the enlistment of workers from all areas of the industry and the reduction in budgets that the war effort demanded, there would not be enough films produced in Hollywood to cover demand in Central and Latin America. It was seen that Mexico could fill the gap in the market opened up by Hollywood's commitments to the war effort and the demise of Mexico's other rival, Argentina, which was under embargoes because of the pro-Axis stance adopted by its successive governments of the period. The Mexican government's own indecision on its position with regard to the war was resolved in May 1942, when German U-boats sank a Mexican oil tanker off the coast of Florida. The US rewarded Mexico's subsequent declaration of war on Germany, Italy and Japan at the end of May with shipments of raw stock and equipment to support Mexico's growing film production needs. This US support has been seen as a resignation to the loss of its Latin American market during the war years (Mora, 1982: 59). On the contrary, what the war secured was Mexican dependence on and cooperation with Hollywood, establishing the US presence firmly within the Mexican industry and Latin American cinema. Simultaneously, the US government, together with the administration of Manuel Ávila Camacho, whose *sexenio* as Mexican president started in 1940, regenerated strategic economic links between the two countries.<sup>19</sup>

In 1942, the Banco de México, together with the government and producers founded the Banco Cinematográfico SA. The group founded the bank to deal solely with the management of cinema and film production funding. One of the key advantages to producers was that the bank could grant them and their investors credit for up to two million pesos, which was then repayable over a ten-year period. At the same time, the Comité Coordinador y de Fomento de la Industria Cinematográfica Mexicana was formed, headed by the

director/producer Fernando de Fuentes (representing production companies and the studios), the Ministry of Interior's director of cinema, Gregorio Castillo and the leader of the Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Industria Cinematográfica (STIC) Enrique Solís. Their brief was to coordinate and encourage collaboration between independent investors, the state and the unions. The MPSA agreed with its suggestion to merge the Stahl studios with Azteca and to modernise Azteca and CLASA to establish them as the main studios for national production. The funding would come partially from the OCIAA and the finance to be administered through the Banco de México. However, in return for support for materials and finance, the OCIAA was to have control over the content of the films produced. This it administered through a cinema division the Banco de México formed whose declared aims were:

[T]o be the channel through which the Office of the Coordinator may take part in the financing of Mexican films which, by reason of their theme, educational value, or other special merits it might be difficult to produce commercially, but which would serve to bring about better Inter-American understanding, imbue the peoples of the continent with ideas of liberty and patriotism, or make known to the nations of America the history and traditions of the American Republics. The selection of the films to be produced under these conditions, as well as the amount of financing, shall be determined by the Mexican Committee with the approval of the Office of the Coordinator.

(Fein, 2001: 170)

Profits from these films would 'be exclusively for the producers [...] to stimulate them towards the Inter-American activities which it is desired to foment' (Fein, 2001: 170). With the major source of finance administered and controlled through the bank, with its intricate links to the OCIAA, the practical result was that no film was made without US approval. However, according to Fein 'coercion was hardly necessary; Mexican producers went out of their way to please US and Mexican officials' (Fein, 2001: 171). Indeed, the deal was



mutually convenient for the US, with its push for Pan-American propaganda and the Mexican producers, who saw this as a way to make money with low risks and to begin to develop the industry.<sup>20</sup> In a seemingly paradoxical approach, the close alliance between the Banco Cinematográfico, the Banco de México and OCIAA, actively encouraged 'nationalist' films. However, given the contemporary scenario, it was not as contradictory as it appears. Indeed, it was in the government's and producers' interest to promote *mexicanidad* as a guise to hide the burgeoning US presence in Mexico. At the same time, national pride stimulated the internal consumer market and consequently benefited US market investment in Mexico.<sup>21</sup> The full extent of US intervention into the so-called Golden Age film industry is summarised in a comment made in 1944 by a top-ranking official from the US embassy in Mexico City: 'Mexican motion picture people [...] remarked that they can begin no picture, receive no allocation for their film stock, nor take any other important action without consulting Alstock or Fouce' (Fein, 2001: 170).<sup>22</sup>

Given such pervasive intervention from the US in the Mexican economy and the film industry, in addition to the transnational links encouraged by both governments, Ramírez Berg's belief in the *época de oro* and a consummate *mexicanidad* becomes a restrictive analysis, complicit with neo-nationalist sentiment, rather than a firm critical base on which to establish theories of Mexican visual aesthetic.

### **Figueroa and the Transnational**

If transiting the national paradigm provides a useful perspective from which to gain a wider understanding of the Mexican film industry, then an examination of a specific industrial area or discipline, such as cinematography, from a transnational viewpoint can be equally productive. In the final part of this chapter, I shall explore the possibilities of a transnational approach in relation to Figueroa and Mexican cinematography. The development of Figueroa's career exemplifies transnationalism in operation. Indeed, his central position within the Mexican industry provides a fruitful case study through which to explore how the close industrial,

political and economic links between the Mexican and international industries, particularly Hollywood, impacted on the development of cinematography and film aesthetics in Mexico.

Transnationalism is by definition a complex set of interactions. With regard to Figueroa and the development of Mexican cinematography, there are two main areas to examine. First, there is Figueroa's preparation as a director of photography, the transnational nature of his entry to and training in the industry and the contexts in which he continued to develop cinematography throughout his career. Second, and intricately woven into Figueroa's development, is the transnational nature of film technology and language. That is, where and why technologies originated, how Figueroa (and by association the Mexican industry) acquired them and how he used and, in some cases, adapted them with his aim to create a Mexican aesthetic. A crucial question arises from these points – can there, in effect, be a national aesthetic, a Mexican cinematographic style? Indeed, can any country propose a *national* cinematic aesthetic, when the use of *multi-national* equipment and processes is dependent on the acculturation of set procedures and practices which dictate the way in which equipment is used and practices followed?

Significantly, in the many texts on Figueroa his relationship with Hollywood, although made explicit, is never analysed.<sup>23</sup> As indicated above, in common with Ramírez Berg, most writers assume a national stance when discussing the cinematographer.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, they fail to acknowledge the complex relations he enjoyed with the US in terms of his cinematographic development. Significantly, Figueroa often mentioned his connections with Hollywood in interviews, yet his links to Hollywood studios and experience with the US political authorities are simplified or ignored to fit a nationalist agenda. His complex and seemingly contradictory relationship with Hollywood is evident when one examines statements made by Figueroa in interviews:

Hollywood tiene un sistema; no han podido con ese sistema muchas personas, empezando por DW Griffiths, [...] Abel Gance de Francia, después Eisenstein y Orson Welles, ninguno de esos grandes artistas aceptó el sistema de Hollywood, y por eso prácticamente fracasaron.

(Huacuja del Toro, 1997: 31)

En fin, el sistema de Hollywood es algo que algunos no hemos aceptado por su hermetismo.

(Galindo Ulloa, 1997: 2)

By contrast Figueroa also stated:

Hollywood quedó en mi vida como un espacio de formación profesional y una oportunidad para conocer entrañables amistades y el trabajo de otros fotógrafos como Stanley Cortez, Lee Garmes, James Wong Howe, Bert Glenon y George Barnes.

(Figueroa, 1995: 60)

This apparently ambivalent attitude to Hollywood, with on one hand, his rejection of the system, and on the other, his acknowledged connection with it, is symptomatic of the vacillating attitude the Mexican film industry holds in relation to Hollywood. However, on closer examination of Figueroa's professional development and the associations he formed within the transnational forum, fundamental to both the US and the Mexican film industries, his stance is not as contradictory as it may appear.

Even before Figueroa entered the film industry, he had become part of transnational processes. One of his first jobs was working as an assistant to the portrait photographer José Guadalupe Velasco. Critics have never cited the period Figueroa worked for Velasco as influential in the cinematographer's development, yet in his autobiography Figueroa acknowledges the seminal importance of his time under Velasco's tutelage (Figueroa, 1988: 24).

Velasco had been working in Chicago and on his return to Mexico was the first portrait photographer in the country to use artificial lighting. He was popular for his stylised portraiture and his theatrical manipulation of his subjects.<sup>25</sup> Figueroa's responsibilities as Velasco's assistant included retouching the negatives, printing and making portraits in the photographer's absence (Figueroa, 1988: 24). Velasco learned techniques in Chicago that he imported to Mexico along with the studio's lighting rig and cameras (Galindo Ulloa, 1997: 2). Through exposure to US photographic techniques, Figueroa became fascinated with the innovative and imaginative potential of lighting and printing, factors that would be fundamental to his working practices as a cinematographer. His exposure to new lighting and processing procedures became the foundation for his work to come, not only in his film portraiture of stars such as María Félix, Dolores del Río and Pedro Armendáriz, but also with his creation of atmosphere and ambience in studio and interior sets (Figueroa, 1988: 24).

Whilst Figueroa was working with Velasco, Gilberto Martínez Solares (who was also to become one of the foremost cinematographers of his generation) introduced him to Alex Phillips. La Nacional Productora de Películas contracted Phillips, a Canadian director of photography in Hollywood, to work on the first Mexican sound film production, *Santa* (1931). Phillips was not the only non-Mexican or Hollywood trained crew member working on the production. Its director was the Spaniard Antonio Moreno and Mexican actors Lupita Tovar and Donald Reed/Ernesto Guillén had been working in the US industry before *Santa*. The lightweight sound system, developed by the Rodríguez brothers, Joselito and Roberto, in Hollywood was imported into Mexico for the film (García Riera 1998: 76). The transnational nature of the *Santa* cast, crew and new technology was representative of the early sound era in Mexico and, indeed, the film industry as a whole, with many technicians and actors moving between North and South America and Europe and the use of equipment developed and manufactured in Europe and the US by ex-patriates.

When Figueroa entered the industry, many members of the Mexican film community had been or were still working in the US. The directors Chano Urueta, René Cardona, Emilio Fernández and Roberto Rodríguez, the actors Ramón Navarro, his cousin Dolores del Río, and Lupita Tovar and Pedro Armendáriz, among others, spent a significant part of their careers in Hollywood or, as in the case of Fernando de Fuentes, had been educated in the US (García Riera, 1998: 81). Figures such as the Argentine producer Hanson moved between North and South America, working on Spanish language films for the Southern market and English language versions. Hanson, together with Paul H. Bush from the US, produced *María Elena* (1936, Raphael J. Sevilla), which was shot in Mexico and cut into a Spanish and US version in Hollywood.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, the Mexican film community epitomised the transnational nature of cinema. Raphael J. Sevilla had moved between Hollywood, Mexico and Spain to direct *Él*, which starred fellow Mexican Virginia Zuri (García Riera, 1992a: 113). Ramón Navarro directed *Contra la corriente* in 1935 for RKO. Lupe Vélez worked in England during 1935 and starred in three films. Lupita Tovar was also in England for *The Invader* with Buster Keaton and in Spain for *Vidas rotas* and in the same year Celia Montalván worked in France with Renoir on *Toni* (García Riera, 1992a: 207-208).

Figueroa came into this transnational, multicultural and technically mobile world on the invitation of Phillips, who offered him his first film job as the stills man on *Revolución* (1932, Miguel Contreras Torres). From stills man, he went on to be lighting director on *El escándalo*, directed by Chano Urueta in 1934, *Primo Basilio* directed by Pedro de Alarcón in the same year and Raphael J. Sevilla's *María Elena* in 1935. Urueta had trained and worked as a director for RKO in Hollywood and had been Tisse's assistant during the filming of Eisenstein's *¡Que Viva México!* during 1931-32 (Lesser, 1991: 38, García Riera, 1998: 87). Sevilla had also spent a formative part of his career as a technical advisor at Warner Brothers before he returned to Mexico to direct (García Reira, 1998: 85). Moreover, when Figueroa started in the film industry, the leading cinematographers were non-Mexicans: Canadian Alex

Phillips and Jack Draper and Ross Fisher from the United States who, like Phillips, were contracted in Hollywood.<sup>27</sup> Hence the industry that Figueroa entered was, from the first, a transnational concern. Indeed, Figueroa's rapid rise over the next four years, from stills man to international award winning cinematographer in 1936, could be seen as a result of the relatively fast growth of Mexican filmmaking. Together with the dearth of adequately prepared local technicians and the encouragement and training he was given in Mexico and the US, his career was effectively 'hot-housed'.

The key point during the four years of Figueroa's speedy promotion to one of the central figures of the Mexican industry was the period he spent in Hollywood during in 1935, or as he puts it: 'Fue para mí un año decisivo. Aprendí los conocimientos básicos de mi oficio e hice amigos y contactos que me sirvieron toda la vida' (Issac, 1993: 26). The financier Alberto J. Pani funded his stay in the US film capital. Pani founded the new studio and production house Cinematográfica Latina Americana S.A (CLASA) with his son Rico, a group of entrepreneurs and a large government subsidy and offered Figueroa the post of director of photography in the new studios.<sup>28</sup> The reason why Pani should want to contract the inexperienced Figueroa in place of Phillips or even Victor Herrera, the most respected Mexican cinematographer at the time, is not clear. Indeed, Figueroa himself acknowledged his own lack of experience and at first declined the offer. However, Pani persisted and suggested that Figueroa take a scholarship funded from the company to study cinematography in Hollywood. Whilst in the US, Figueroa also acted as CLASA's representative and purchased two Mitchell cameras for the new studios (Issac, 1993: 24-25).

On his arrival in Hollywood, the apprentice cinematographer spent the mornings at the Goldwyn studios in Santa Monica and the afternoons with Charles Kimball in the edit room where he assisted him on the Spanish version of *María Elena*, on which he had been lighting director. It was through his time with Kimball that Figueroa developed his awareness of the importance of the edit.<sup>29</sup> During this period, another Mexican editor Joe

Noriega, an RKO employee, befriended him and introduced Figueroa to Marlene Dietrich, Stan Laurel, and Dolores del Río who, like many of the members of the Hollywood community, were immigrants to the United States.<sup>30</sup> But it was Figueroa's contact with Gregg Toland that was to be his most profound influence, not only in terms of Figueroa's development as a director of photography, but also as an illustration of the rich, complex cultural and aesthetic web of interactions between Hollywood, Europe and Mexico.

### **The Transnational Web: Toland and Figueroa**

In 1935, although he still had not reached the height of his career, Toland was considered one of the best directors of photography in Hollywood and had been nominated for an Academy award that year for his work on *Les Misérables* (Richard Boleslawski, 1934). Alex Phillips had provided Figueroa with a letter of introduction to Toland, who like Phillips, had been an assistant to George Barnes and Arthur Miller. Toland 'saw something' in Figueroa (Figueroa, 1988: 35; Dey, 1992: 36) and took him on as an apprentice to work on the shooting of *Splendor* (Elliot Nugent, 1935). Subsequently, the two men kept in regular contact. Indeed, Toland frequently visited Figueroa in Mexico to advise him on his work over the next five years (Galindo Ulloa, 1997: 2) and Figueroa took every opportunity to observe Toland at work and discuss technical developments with him in Hollywood. This professional and personal friendship continued until Toland's premature death in 1948.<sup>31</sup>

By the 1940s, Toland's contract at Goldwyn was unparalleled in the industry in that it corresponded to the above-line staff of producers, performers and directors. The contract granted him freedom to experiment with new techniques and to develop new technologies and style (Maltin, 1978: 17; Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, 1985: 346). For example, when shooting *The Best Years of our Lives* (William Wyler, 1946) Toland initiated experiments with sets that were of conventional domestic size and

dimensions, unlike the usual studio set which allowed room for the camera and lights. Toland invited Figueroa to come and watch him work and discuss the challenge (Figueroa, 1988: 101).

Goldwyn's support of Toland was not, however, that of a beneficent patron who encouraged a struggling individual artist, as has been suggested in some writing about Hollywood studios' relationships with cinematographers (Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, 1985: 345). On the contrary, it was a sound business investment in order to improve the quality and efficiency of the production process. Therefore, the studio's finance department kept a tight control on the relationship between standard studio practices and innovation (Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, 1988: 108-110).<sup>32</sup>

The freedom that Toland enjoyed in his relentless drive to push the limits of the technology and to find the appropriate visual expression for a given film or sequence influenced Figueroa's own insistence to choose the productions on which he worked and his commitment to innovative techniques (Figueroa, 1988: 35).

Good photography means a good deal more to me than a well photographed picture, [Toland] said. A picture may have carefully considered composition, fine lighting, depth and character and still not be acceptable as 'good' photography... the competent cinematographer must get on his film, in addition to the above requirements, pictures that fit the dialogue, the action, and the subject matter of the sequence.

(Mitchell, 1956: 509)

In other words, Toland, and consequently Figuero were determined that the image should function as a manifestation of the internal world of the narrative. This view is linked to European Expressionist art in which the emotional and psychological inner core of the subject is rendered through non-realist techniques. Figueroa's self-acknowledged influences, Goya,



Dürer, Rembrandt and Turner, were all precursors to the expressionists in their use of light, composition, chiaroscuro, contrast and their subjective approach to their subjects (Figueroa, 1988: 185; Lynton, 1981: 30-49).

Figueroa also wrote that German expressionist films such as *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1920), *Nosferatu* (F.W. Murnau, 1922), *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927) and *Faust* (F.W. Murnau, 1926) were influential on him (Figueroa, 1988: 185).

Significantly, Toland shot director/cameraman Karl Freund's *Mad Love/The Hands of Orlac* in 1935, the year that Figueroa studied with him. Freund had been a cinematographer at UFA, Berlin's internationally renowned film studios, and shot *Metropolis* with Lang and *The Last Laugh* (1924) and *Satanas* (1920) with Murnau before arriving in Hollywood with the many other German émigrés in the early to mid-1930s. Freund, the leading exponent of German cinematography, employed all the established conventions of expressionist style in his use of fluid camera movements, extreme angles and lighting techniques. His influence is evident in Toland's work and not only on the films on which they collaborated. *Wuthering Heights* (William Wyler, 1939) for which Toland won an Oscar, *The Grapes of Wrath* (John Ford, 1940), *The Little Foxes* (William Wyler, 1941) and the seminal *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941) are a few examples of the way in which Toland incorporated and developed Freund's techniques.

Although Toland (and subsequently Figueroa) significantly extended the application of expressionist technique in film, the two cinematographers are most renowned for their exploration of depth of field and perspective.<sup>33</sup> The development of new faster film emulsions throughout the 1930s, together with advances in lighting technology, allowed Toland to experiment with smaller apertures and thereby increase focal depth.<sup>34</sup> I argue that Toland's aim, and certainly Figueroa's pursuit of depth of field, was to search for greater expression of the internal integrity of the narrative themes of the production. Their connection to the European expressionist techniques and aesthetic practices of filmmakers such as Freund confirms this and highlights

the transnational nature of not only their personal work but also of all film production in Hollywood during the 1930s.

Both Hollywood and the Mexican film industry of the 1930s and early 1940s were spaces where aesthetics and practices convened and struggled with each other. Whereas Fein has so lucidly argued that the transnational, in terms of politics and economics, were integral to the Mexican industry, I would argue that the transnational extended to aesthetic approaches and that this was particularly apparent in the development of cinematography. As Hollywood repositioned peripheral personalities like Toland to the centre of the system, any political ambiguity and conflict within the product, the films, could be contained and in so doing the ruling elite in Hollywood maintained not only control over the means of production, that is the technology, but also contained any potentially subversive ideas and philosophies that resulted from any challenge to established conventions.

Further, besides his obvious technical and aesthetic influence, Toland also championed and passed onto Figueroa a re-assessment of the traditional role and function of the cinematographer. His unprecedented contract with Goldwyn disrupted the notion of the above-line and below-line hierarchy and Toland maintained a privileged status within Hollywood, despite the fact that his work at times caused controversy and exposed fissures in the system that produced the films. Figueroa's contact with Toland made him aware of the importance of his own position in the Mexican film industry and culture and he handled his career and subsequent iconic status with care. He used his position to function as a negotiator between the Mexican political elite and the workers, particularly in his union role as the head of the camera and technicians' sector, of which he was a founder member, and in the formation of Film Mundiales.

Nonetheless, it is crucial to take into account that transnational processes are not evenly weighted, nor easily analysed. Figueroa's career and aesthetic drive evolved in a politically and socially complicated arena. It would be intellectually convenient

to assume that Figueroa maintained complete control over the artistic, personal and professional choices he made and that he maintained a carefully managed professional life, based on simple decisions. Indeed, this is the impression given by his own comments and the writings of commentators such as Issac (1993) and Poniatowska (1996). When Figueroa wrote that it would have been a 'serious mistake' (1988: 197) to accept the offer Sam Goldwyn made to him to take Toland's place at his studios, he justified his decision on the grounds that he preferred to remain in the creative and 'mystical ambience' of Mexico. He argued that it would have been impossible to explore cinematographic style in the way he would wish outside of his home country (Rivera, 1995: 60). Certainly, these may have been factors in his decision. However, one has to consider Figueroa's choice to remain in Mexico from a more empirical standpoint of his historical, transnational context. That is, the knotty set of political, social and economic ties between Mexico and the US that played out in the constantly evolving contact zone of a new conflict, the Cold War.

### **Figueroa's Cold War**

The close transnational alliances forged between Hollywood and the Mexican industry before and during the World War II continued to develop during the post-war period and went hand in hand with Mexico's move to the right in national politics. The political shift to the right coincided with the development of the Cold War and the US anti-communist purges. President Miguel Alemán (1946-1952) continued Ávila Camacho's development of the private sector and moved even further away from nationalisation and social reform in the name of modernisation and progress.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, during the Alemán presidency social welfare expenditure dipped to an all-time low of 13.3% of total government expenditure (Erfani, 1995: 74). The regime had to find a way to justify its abandonment of peasant welfare and employed the Mexican film industry to modernise and reshape the nationalist discourse of the war years by updating the notion of defending *la patria* against ideologically subversive forces. As a result, the government justified continued promotion of industrial wealth at the expense of social reform by stating that capitalism assured the security of all Mexicans, despite the fact that the wealth produced did not disseminate beyond the ruling elite. But where were Figueroa and

his work situated in relation to these economically motivated political strategies? To tease out the tangled situation outlined above, and examine it in relation to Figueroa, exposes the inherent fissures of US-Mexican relations during this period and demonstrates how the workings of transnational politics and economics affected Mexican film production during the Cold War period.

During the war, Figueroa had played a key role in Rockefeller's drive for visual education in Latin America. In 1942, he attended seminars along with other cultural workers, doctors and educators, at the Disney studios. These discussions were to develop ideas for short films aimed at Latin American audiences to combat illiteracy, poor hygiene and improve health and agricultural methods (Figueroa, 1988: 131-132). In 1945, the film magazine *Novelas de la pantalla*, outlined Figueroa's ideas for visual education in Mexico. Short films from the US would be adapted and others produced in Mexico in close conjunction with the film union (García Riera, 1992c: 215). By 1948, the think-tank sessions of 1942 had developed into a highly organised system of propaganda administered through the United States Information Service (USIS). US-loaned projectors showed films to workers in major Mexican industrial companies throughout the republic. A US embassy sound truck transported a screen and projector around the country to project films in schools and colleges and was put into service at political rallies and public events, in conjunction with Mexican operators, under the auspices of the Filmoteca Nacional. In a looking-glass inversion of the Soviet agitprop trains of the 1920s, trains travelled the country projecting US industrial capitalism rather than universal socialism and transcended the Mexican border, physically and ideologically.<sup>36</sup> However, by 1950 the US State Department had changed its remit and prioritised its contact with 'active labor collaborators', not in the name of social welfare and health, nor indeed to further industrial capitalist working practices and systems, but rather to undermine potential communist subversion in the union movement (Fein, 1998: 412).

Fein suggests that both Figueroa and Fernández 'served [...] the anti-communist cinematic crusade of Hollywood (and the US State Department)' (2000: 87). Superficially, this may appear to be the case, particularly in the light of Figueroa's

enthusiasm for the visual education programme and Fein's interpretation of John Ford's 1947 film *The Fugitive*, shot by Figueroa and co-produced by Fernández. However, despite Fein's compelling account of the film as an anti-communist propaganda piece, I would argue that the film embodied a more complex situation. Fein defines the Mexican regime under Alemán and Mexico's film industry, as collaborators with the US capitalist, right-wing agenda.<sup>37</sup> In terms of Alemán's political ambitions, this is certain. However, in relation to key figures within the film industry, specifically Figueroa, there is firm evidence to suggest otherwise, making analysis of Figueroa's role in cultural politics more complicated than Fein suggests.

In a memorandum dated 26 April 1967, the US embassy legation in Mexico City wrote to the director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in Washington with regard to Figueroa:

In view of the Subject's prominence as a motion picture director [sic], his relationship to former Mexican President ADOLFO LOPEZ MATEOS, and the ease with which he obtains visas by waiver from the INS for travel to the United States, this Office feels no continuous investigation of his activities is warranted.

(Memorandum 4-26-67 Ref: (105-3040) Re Mex letter to Bureau 3-6-67 FBI file no 100-368518)

There is no indication as to when the FBI instigated constant surveillance of Figueroa, but available records show that investigation and recording of his movements were firmly in place by 1950, as evidenced in a memorandum from the legal attaché at the Embassy in Mexico City to the director of the FBI:

It is believed that the Bureau has considerable material in its files concerning the above individual. [...] FIGUEROA's political tendencies are generally regarded as pro-communist and his name has been connected with various front group activities.

(Memorandum from the legal attaché at the Embassy in Mexico City to the director of the FBI, 10.3.50 FBI file no 100-368518)<sup>38</sup>

Despite the recommendation in the memo of 1967, observation certainly continued into the 1970s and probably beyond.<sup>39</sup> However limited the information, it is evident from the reasons given to withhold documents by the US Department of Justice and the State Department that Figueroa, far from being considered an ally in the 'crusade' against communism, was in fact a risk to US national security.

It was an offer made by John Ford to Figueroa after the shooting of *The Fugitive* that first revealed the FBI's investigation of Figueroa. Figueroa had signed a three-picture contract with Ford's production company, Argosy (Issac, 1993: 38; Figueroa, 1988: 40). However, the union, International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Moving Picture Technicians, Artists and Allied Crafts of the United States, (IATSE) refused him permission to work. The reason given was that Figueroa had instigated a ban on the processing of Hollywood negative stock at Mexican laboratories in support of the strike by US laboratory workers (Figueroa, 1988: 40; Issac, 1993: 38). However, Richard Walsh, the president of IATSE, had travelled to Mexico to interview Figueroa and, in a letter from Gregg Toland to Figueroa, the actual reason for refusal of the permit appears to be otherwise:

I will try to set down all of the facts and rumors regarding your shooting a picture here [...] I had a call from Herb Aller who is the business manager of the local. He said that he had just talked with Walsh [...] and Walsh had said that under no circumstances were you to be allowed to work here. He further said that he had just talked with you in Mexico and that you were a self-admitted communist. [...] Then I talked with Ford and he told me how Walsh had arrived in Mexico in an arragont [sic] manner and seemed to want to take over the affairs there. Ford told me of your conversation with Walsh and explained that Walsh had said to you, "You are talking like a communist". You had answered, " Maybe I am and it would be none of your business if I were." [...] As far as I can tell from here you will not be accorded the courtesy of working here for which I am truly sorry.

(Toland, 1947)

Rather cryptically, Toland adds, 'Personally I hope you do what I would do in your position. I'll let you guess what that might be...[T]ry not to introduce my letters to you into any discussions as I send them to you as a personal friend'.<sup>40</sup>

Sixteen months later, in September 1948, Toland died unexpectedly at the age of forty-four of a heart attack. In the light of Figueroa's experience with Walsh, his refusal to take over Toland's contract with Goldwyn went much deeper than his publicly-stated desire to remain in Mexico to continue his cinematographic ambition to recreate the *mística mexicana* on the screen. With the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) trials still resonant in the international arena and the continuation of the committee's investigations, if Figueroa had moved to the US, he would certainly have faced the risk of being subpoenaed. This was confirmed when in 1951 he was named at the proceedings by director Robert Rossen and again in 1952, by Elia Kazan (Issac, 1993: 42-47; Figueroa, 1988: 133-136 and 212-234; Rivera, 1995: 62-63).<sup>41</sup>

Following an interview on 9 March 1950 with Figueroa, Wallace Clarke of the visa office in the US embassy in Mexico City, sent a memorandum to the ambassador which was forwarded to the FBI. The memo records:

[W]hen the conversation drifted to his political beliefs and his membership in various political organisations in Mexico, he was unwilling to respond. He did, upon my asking regarding his membership in the Partido Popular, that he is a member of Partido Popular but that for some time he has taken no active interest because he was not in accord with some the recent expressions of that Party. He remarked that he has never resigned from the Partido but failed to explain why he had not done so... [H]e refused to discuss his political activities or beliefs beyond the statement that he was a member of the Partido Popular and he remarked that he thought he had said too much when he said that.

(Memorandum from Wallace Clarke to the Ambassador, 9.3.50 FBI

File 100 – 368518)

Significantly, in public, Figueroa always stated that his politics were a personal matter and categorically denied membership of any political party (Issac, 1993: 38; 49; de Orellana, 1988: 44; Poniatowska, 1996: 64). Yet, in the manuscript of his autobiography there is a section marked for deletion in which he writes that he was a member of the Partido Popular Socialista (PPS) for two months, but resigned because of proposed infringements of the party statute. Moreover, he had intimate personal links with leading members of the party. His sister-in-law and cousin, Esperanza López Figueroa (née Mateos), with whom he had a close relationship, was assistant to Vicente Lombardo Toledano, the Marxist former head of the Confederación de Trabajadores de México (CTM) and founder of the PPS in 1948. Lombardo Toledano was the foremost figure in actively challenging US-aligned capital development in Mexico in the late 1940s and early 1950s and in 1952 became the presidential candidate for the Communist Party (Fein, 1998: 415). Figueroa had known him since the late 1930s when Lombardo Toledano was still head of the CTM.<sup>42</sup> In 1949, Esperanza López Figueroa took over the administration of a major strike at the mine of Nueva Rosita y Cloete in Coahuila, on Lombardo Toledano's behalf. Figueroa became involved in the organisation and support of the strike (Figueroa, 1988: 201-207). Although the miners' action ultimately failed, the strike had seriously threatened the close links between the owners, the US based American Smelting and Refining Company (ASARCO), and the Alemán regime.<sup>43</sup>

However, it was not only his political associations that put Figueroa under FBI surveillance and his name onto the notorious Hollywood blacklist (Rivera, 1995:62). His activism in union politics was well-known. A keen advocate of the union movement, he resigned from the film union, Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Industria Cinematográfica (STIC) in 1945, because of the corruption he witnessed both in the union and the CTM (then under the leadership of Fidel Velázquez). He subsequently took a leading role in the formation of the celebrity-led and endorsed union, Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Producción Cinematográfica de la República Mexicana (STPC de RM), (Issac, 1993:51-64; García Riera, 1992: 215-220; Figueroa, 1988: 112-128; Poniatowska, 1996: 58-63). Despite his involvement with the US and Mexican governments in establishing production links with Hollywood,



through his contact with RKO and the US laboratories, much of his work for the union movement was in direct conflict with US-owned companies in Mexico, such as ASARCO. This, together with his active support of industrial action by the US unions, worked against the drive to internalise and project the US-Mexican *relación especial* to the Mexican people. Indeed, it often threatened its fundamental stability. Together with his assistance of the Republican refugees from Spain at the end of the civil war, his membership (however brief) of the PPS and close personal associations with other prominent left-wing figures in the cultural pantheon, including Rivera and Álfaro Siqueiros, Figueroa was, indeed, a prime subject for FBI investigation.

### Conclusion

The above evidence produces a conundrum. On the one hand, there is Ramírez Berg's questionable presentation of Figueroa as the ultimate nationalist filmmaker, the progenitor of an independent, specifically Mexican classicism, counter to US influence and intervention. On the other hand, Fein presents a transnational Figueroa, integrated into the US-Mexican drive against the left, a key player in the refashioning of post-war Mexican nationalism as anti-communism (Fein, 1998: 433). In the light of my own research, this hypothesis is equally problematic.

However, in a return to López's call for a wider ranging debate on the interface between Hollywood and Mexican industries, these overt contradictions can be examined as integral to the transnational processes between the two. It also has to be acknowledged that Hollywood itself was, and remains, essentially transnational.<sup>44</sup> Neither can one restrict consideration of the transnational in Mexico to its relations with the US industry and successive governments. Its dealings with other Latin American countries and Spain has to be taken into consideration, along with the immigration of film workers to Mexico, such as Luis Buñuel, Alejandro Jodorowsky and Luis Alcoriza.

Fein's lucid and incisive analysis of transnational cooperation or 'collaboration' serves as a paradigm for analysis. However, it is essential to be vigilant of the fissures inherent in any economic, political, social and ideological exchange. Fein

identifies and exposes these at the level of government and within the wider canvas of events. But the inherent paradoxes within the gaps of the transnational process, the central knot of contradictions that contradict themselves, become evident on examination of the work and actions of leading members of the Mexican film community, such as Figueroa, whose work was intricately bound up in the transnational alliances forged between the US and Mexico.<sup>45</sup>

Figueroa's career was not a smooth, pre-planned rise to fame to fortune as suggested by Poniatowksa (1996) and Issac (1993). His development of a cinematic style and its ideological content was not as straightforward as has been suggested by Ramírez Berg and Fein. As has been demonstrated, Figueroa's apparent choices were often decisions made under extreme political pressure and involved compromise and evasive action to allow him to continue his creative work. Nevertheless, the transnational economic and political forces that surrounded Figueroa in the first part of his career were, I would argue, fundamental to the development of his aesthetic that would have such an impact on Mexican cinema.

In the following chapter, I investigate how transnational commercial interests in the Mexican music and radio industries informed the nascent sound film in Mexico. In a close analysis of *Allá en el Rancho Grande* (Fernando de Fuentes, 1936) Figueroa's first film, I go on to examine how his emerging visual style embodied these transnational influences and, as a result, question the film as a nationalist discourse.

---

<sup>1</sup> Fernández was also known as *el indio* Fernández, a nickname that he encouraged to emphasise his Indian heritage through the maternal side of his family.

<sup>2</sup> Figueroa's stand against the corruption of the film union Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Industria Cinematográfica (S.T.I.C.) and his key role in the formation of an alternative professional body, the Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Producción Cinematográfica (S.T.P.C.), gave him widespread public recognition and standing. In addition, his support of the miners' unions, his public struggles to defend workers' rights, his active support of refugees during the Spanish civil war together with his position as representative of the Mexican film industry in a

---

transnational partnership with the US to educate audiences both sides of the border, made him a well-known and popular public figure (see García Riera, 1992c: 215).

<sup>3</sup> See bibliography for a list of Ramírez Berg's publications. He is currently returning to an analysis of cinematic style in his forthcoming publication *The Story of Film - A Stylistic History of the Movies*.

<sup>4</sup> Other readings of Figueroa's work within national paradigms include, Tuñón (1993) and Ruy Sánchez (1992).

<sup>5</sup> Ramírez Berg's use of the term 'Fernández-Figueroa style' is indebted to the title of the photographic section in Paco Taibo's biography of Fernández, *La estética Fernández-Figueroa* (1986).

<sup>6</sup> See for example Levin Rojo (1996: 19-27), Vázquez Mantecón (1996: 35-37), Ruy-Sánchez (1988: 20-21) and, indeed, Fernández and Figueroa themselves in Issac (1993: 24-25), Cakoff (1995: 16) and Figueroa (1988: 73-74).

<sup>7</sup> Such has been the potency of the Fernández-Figueroa paradigm that Stephen Hart, in his essay on *Los olvidados* (Hart, 2005: 66-67) actually confuses Figueroa with Fernández, when he names him Gabriel 'el indio' Figueroa and credits him with Fernández's claim 'soy el cine mexicano'.

<sup>8</sup> Julia Tuñón goes further than Ramírez Berg to suggest that Fernández dictated the aesthetic of his films. Indeed, she quotes him as saying 'I am more a photographer than a director' (Tuñón, 1988: 25). Although she acknowledges Figueroa as a 'talent behind the camera' (Tuñón, 1995: 185), she interprets cinematography in Fernández's films as the product of the director himself. This disregard for the input of the cinematographer is a common and convenient assumption in auteurist studies, as is discussed in Chapter One.

<sup>9</sup> Ramírez Berg cites twenty-three films in both articles. As there is not a filmography provided, I assume that he discounts *Rebelión de los colgados*, which Fernández walked out on, half-way through the shoot, to be replaced by Alfredo B Crevenna. I have counted this as a collaboration between the two as they both worked on 50% of the production. Moreover, Figueroa carried on shooting the film whilst a director was found to finish the production.

<sup>10</sup> See Noble (2005: 15) for an overview of the various dates scholars and critics have set for the Golden Age.

<sup>11</sup> In common with Ramírez Berg, many scholars base their arguments on popular assumptions around the terms *mexicanidad/lo mexicano* and *época de oro* and as a result fail to engage with the contradictions their use provokes. Mora (1982), Noriega and Ricci (1994), Paranagua (1995), Hershfield and Maciel (1999), Acevedo-Muñoz (2003) all employ undefined notions of the 'Golden Age', *'época de oro'* and 'classical' without critical distance from the assumptions the terms denote. In *Fragments of a Golden Age*, Joseph, Rubenstein and Zolov define it as, '[...] a metonym for a nostalgically depicted, bygone era, a period when lo mexicano still invoked a series of roughly shared assumptions about cultural belonging and political stability under a unifying patriarchy.' (2001: 9). Yet, of all the writers in the collection, it is only Seth Fein (159-198) who critically deconstructs the concept. Significantly, García Riera and

---

Monsivaís, although they use the term in some texts uncritically, have both questioned the basis of its usage.

<sup>12</sup> Lomnitz (2001: 263-265) gives a lucid and convincing analysis of Paz's and Bonfil's construction and use of the terms 'deep', 'artificial' and 'labyrinthine'. In short, Lomnitz argues that the concept of a 'deep' Mexico tends to re-create or revitalize an obsolete and unpromising form of nationalism that serves to suppress the deep social, economic and political rifts in an authoritarian state.

<sup>13</sup> Most recently, the notion of *mexicanidad* has been used by the neo-Aztec group, the Mexica or *concheros*. See Susana E. Rostas (1997) for an incisive analysis of the multiplicity of social and political meanings the term currently holds, and the ways in which it is expressed. Further, *mexicanidad* in the US chicano or latino community, to which Ramírez Berg belongs, has an equal panoply of connotations.

<sup>14</sup> Ann Marie Stock, in her introduction to *Framing Latin American Cinema* cogently argues the case for more transnational consideration in film scholarship due to the inherent transnational nature of Latin American film production (Stock, 1997: xxiii-xxxiv).

<sup>15</sup> See bibliography for details of Fein's work.

<sup>16</sup> For a detailed reading of trade relations between the two countries during and post-World War II see Lorenzo Meyer (1976: 1335-1342).

<sup>17</sup> Enrique Solís, the leader of the film union fully supported this. See Fein (2000: 169).

<sup>18</sup> See Fein (1996: especially Chapter 5) for a detailed summary and analysis of Hollywood and US government intervention in the Mexican film industry.

<sup>19</sup> Ávila Camacho turned around the perceived radicalism of Cárdenas and developed state capitalism, in close partnership with the US. The war provided the ideal scenario in which the economic interests of the US and Europe, previously slowed by Cárdenas's repatriation policy, could now be regenerated. However, public services, oil, and finance remained nationalised. Consequently, foreign interest focused on investments in manufacturing for the demands of a fast growing national market. Discussion resumed about compensation payments due to the US dating from the Revolution, in which the US demanded Mexico pay forty million dollars in damages. It was agreed that in place of this payment, Washington would credit the full amount to Mexico in order to stabilise the peso. A further twenty million dollars credit was given to Mexico to upgrade the transport system between the US and Mexico to facilitate the movement of materials needed for the war effort. The final part of the deal was an agreement that Mexico would compensate the expropriated US petrochemical companies by paying twenty four million dollars over period of several years. See Meyer (1976: 1338-1339).

<sup>20</sup> For a full account of Mexican film propaganda in World War II see Fein (1998a: 79-104).

<sup>21</sup> Dolores del Río's return to her native film industry from Hollywood in 1943, to star as Indian women in *María Candelaria* and *Flor Silvestre* (Monsivaís, 1997: 79), further boosted confidence and credibility in the industry. Her arrival validated a newly established star system, which she led, together with María Félix, Pedro Infante and Pedro Armendáriz, aided in great part by Figeruoa's cinematic portraits.

---

<sup>22</sup> Fouce was the film consultant in the US embassy in Mexico City.

<sup>23</sup> See for example Ramírez Berg (1992) and (1994), Issac (1993), Poniatowska (1996), Margarita de Orellana (1988), Raquel Peguero (1997), Monsiváis (1997).

<sup>24</sup> One writer who has questioned the nationalist exposition of Figueroa's work is the Mexican commentator and author, Carlos Monsiváis. In a seminal article on Figueroa, he writes that Figueroa's images transcend the accepted nationalism of post-revolutionary rhetoric and indeed reality itself, to propose fundamental truths about Mexican society. Figueroa, he suggests, did not subscribe to an 'unbelievable national aesthetic', rather his images expose facets of Mexican society that problematised the elitist nationalist agenda. The cinematographer's visual interpretation of race and social conditions, although superficially seductive, transcend their integral beauty to express the 'absence' and 'desolation' of Mexican history, the people and the country itself (Monsiváis, 1997). I would concur with Monsiváis's observations. However, he does not go on to examine the implications and causes for the fissures in the political and social issues he perceives as integral to the image. Although transnationalism is implicit in his commentary on Figueroa (and indeed in his writings in general), he does not analyse the exact nature and implications of the relations between Figueroa, the Mexican film industry, US intervention and US-Mexican elite's mutual interests and motivation in transnational relations.

<sup>25</sup> Velasco used elaborate sets and costumes. He would also change womens' make-up and give them cupid-bow lips, painstakingly retouching the negative, adding in eyelashes and emphasising the eyes and mouth. Not surprisingly, the studio became very popular with theatre actors.

<sup>26</sup> *María Elena* was the first big production planned in both English and Spanish. Produced by Paul H. Bush, Hanson and Sánchez Tello, the film was shot by Jack Draper and Alvin Wyckoff and was Pedro Armendáriz's first film. Other actors included Emilio Fernández, Carmen Guerrero and Beatriz Ramos.

<sup>27</sup> Between 1931-36, the only Mexican directors of photography were Guillermo Baqueriza, Antonio Fernández, Jorge Stahl, Víctor Herrera, Ezequiel Carrasco, Manuel Sánchez Valtierra, Agustín Jiménez, Gilberto and Raúl Martínez Solares, who shot a total of twenty six films between them. Phillips alone shot over thirty films, in the same period, Fisher in the region of twenty five and Draper, twenty. During this period most of the Mexican cinematographers underwent training in Hollywood. After the success of Figueroa's *Allá en el Rancho Grande* in 1936, contracts increased for the Mexican cinematographers, although Phillips still remained dominant until the early 1940s (for credits see García Riera, 1992a).

<sup>28</sup> Although the studios survived, the production company was declared bankrupt at the end of 1935 and it was the Cárdenas government who underwrote the company with one million pesos (Mora, 1989: 45).

<sup>29</sup> He always maintained good relations with editors throughout his career, particularly during the 1940s and 1950s, Gloria Schoemann and Carlos Savage. The consciousness of the juxtaposition of shots and the importance of the relationship of the composition between

---

each shot was essential to his subsequent development as a cinematographer (Savage: 1999; Schoemann: 1999).

<sup>30</sup> Del Río became a close friend of Figueroa and was to return to Mexico and work with him extensively as an actor and producer during the 1940s and 1950s. For an analysis of the transnational nature of del Río's stardom see López (1999).

<sup>31</sup> Gabriel Figueroa Flores holds letters from Toland dated 1946 and 1947 in his private collection.

<sup>32</sup> See Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson (1985: 108-110) for an overview of the relationship between standardisation and innovation within the studio system.

<sup>33</sup> Although critical discussion of deep focus usually starts with Toland's work on *Citizen Kane* (Welles, 1941), his contemporaries Lee Garmes and James Wong Howe had experimented with increases in depth of field during the 1930s. David Bordwell lists the development of deep focus during this period, citing Wong Howe, Hal Mohr, Bert Glennon and Toland's mentor Arthur Miller as key figures in the use of lenses wider than the 50mm standard (Bordwell, 1995: 100). Although significant, Wong Howe shot *Transatlantic* (the film Bordwell uses as his example) on a 25mm lens. The result was a range of focus from five to thirty feet, that is from a mid shot to long-shot, (Salt, 1992: 202) which is a much shorter than Toland's usual range.

<sup>34</sup> Throughout the 1930s new, faster stock was being developed. In 1931, Eastman introduced its Super Sensitive panchromatic negative, in 1934 the Agfa-Ansco Super Panchromatic negative ASA 32 was introduced to the US, 1935 the Eastman Super X Panchromatic negative 40ASA and in 1938, Agfa introduced the Agfa Supreme 64 ASA and the Agfa Ultrapan 120 ASA and Eastman introduced its Plus X 80 ASA (which was to become the standard for the US industry) and the Eastman Super XX speed 160 ASA (Cormack, 1978: 83).

<sup>35</sup> For an account of the relationship between Hollywood and the Mexican industry during the Cold War see Fein (2000: 82-85). Also see Erfani (1995: 59-83) for an appraisal of government economic policy under Ávila Camacho and Alemán during the 1940s and 1950s.

<sup>36</sup> For a detailed account of the work of the USIS and its links to the Mexican government agenda see Seth Fein (1998: 400-450).

<sup>37</sup> The term collaboration is problematic when viewed from a European context. This may be because of the strongly negative associations the term has in European history that make it resonate with betrayal and coercion.

<sup>38</sup> I made a request for copies of information held on Gabriel Figueroa in March 2003 under the Freedom of Information Act. In September 2003, I received 21 out of 35 pages reviewed. The fourteen absent pages were withheld for the following reasons:

- 1) under section 552 b1 and b2 they related to other government departments and information concerning these areas was referred directly to them.
- 2) under Section 552a b1 that information contained in these papers had to be kept secret in the interest of national defense or foreign policy, b2 that the information related solely to internal personnel rules and practices of the agency and b7C and D that

---

information contained could be expected to constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy and could be expected to disclose the identity of a confidential source, that is, an informant.

The other department referred to in section 552 b1 and b2 was the Department of State who responded to my request in November 2003, with files on visa applications and the paperwork relating to the refusal to grant Figueroa a US visa.

<sup>39</sup> File A13 138 509 United States Department of Justice Immigration and Naturalization Service, Mexico City 12 May 1970. The US finally granted Figueroa a multiple entry tourist visa at the end of the 1960s. However, when in 1986 John Huston asked him to shoot *Prizzi's Honour*, the State Department refused permission for Figueroa to work in the US. Although he had a tourist multiple entry visa it was marked with X326 and the letter D. He was always stopped at immigration while officials carried out checks on him (Rivera, 1995: 63-64).

<sup>40</sup> Richard F. Walsh was the elected President of IATSE until 1974. Walter F. Diehl, his assistant, succeeded him as President until his retirement in 1986.

<sup>41</sup> Zanuck had approached Figueroa to shoot *Viva Zapata!* with director Elia Kazan in 1950. Figueroa was unable to gain entry to the US to meet with Kazan and John Steinbeck (who had also scripted *La Perla*) to discuss the script. However, the director and scriptwriter arranged to meet him in Mexico. Figueroa had strong disagreements about the representation of Emiliano Zapata and recommended a rewrite, which Steinbeck did. Figueroa declined to work on the film and it was shot eventually in Texas, not Mexico. He remained on friendly terms with Kazan until the director gave his name in his testimony to HUAC. Figueroa recounts the story in most interviews. See Issac (1993: 42-44), Figueroa (1988: 209-211), de Orellana (1988: 41).

<sup>42</sup> Figueroa had produced a short film, financed by the oil companies. Instead of supporting the companies' brief which was to voice their bid against the proposed nationalisation of the industry to the oil workers, Figueroa subverted the film and foregrounded the huge profits made by the companies and the low wages and bad conditions suffered by the workers. Lombardo Toledano had approved the film on the union movements behalf. Not surprisingly, the film was 'disappeared' (Figueroa, 1988: 110-111).

<sup>43</sup> For example, ex-president Abelardo Rodríguez was a major shareholder in the company (Figueroa, 1988: 201). Also, the threat was such that miner leader Francisco Solís (and friend of Figueroa) was assassinated on his return to Coahuila (Figueroa, 1988: 206).

<sup>44</sup> For an overview of relations and business between the European industry and Hollywood up to 1930, see Higson and Maltby (1999).

<sup>45</sup> My personal experience has exposed me to the contradictory nature of this process on many social, economic and political levels. The lack of empiricism evident in the writing of many Mexican intellectuals is probably, in part, due to the extremely complex nature of this Mexican 'experience'. It is not in the remit of this thesis to discuss this at length, but it is necessary to point out that my own experience of living for many years in Mexico, with its

---

transformational complexities, has been fundamental to the approach I have taken in this study.



### Chapter Three

#### **Composing Transnationalism: Visual Style and Song in *Allá en el Rancho Grande* (Fernando de Fuentes, 1936)**

The language of images is as complex as music.

Conrad Hall (Greenhalgh, 2003: 98)

Music is central to Figueroa's work as a cinematographer. Although few of the films can be formally categorised as musicals, many have a significant amount of song and musical sequences integrated into the narrative. Having studied violin as his main instrument at the national music conservatory, Figueroa had a thorough musical education and throughout his life he retained his passion for opera and music (Figueroa, 1988: 15).<sup>1</sup> An analysis of how Figueroa developed a visual style in relation to music reveals new perspectives on his work. His first film as director of photography, *Allá en el Rancho Grande* (Fernando de Fuentes, 1936), has a substantial amount of musical sequences. Significantly, the film established Figueroa's reputation, both in Mexico and internationally. Therefore, I have chosen to focus on this film as it demonstrates Figueroa's nascent visual language and the foundations of his cinematographic approach in his future work. Moreover, on close examination, the film also exposes the latent international nature of the burgeoning sound cinema in Mexico and how the cinematographer and the images he created functioned within this transnational production context at the beginning of his career.

However, before beginning a detailed analysis of Figueroa's visual construction of narrative themes in relation to music, I shall first offer an overview of the way in which music and sound has been approached in film studies. This provides the analytical context within which I shall go on to a detailed study of the seminal film, *Allá en el Rancho Grande*.

## Film Scholarship and Sound

Until the recent revival in sound studies, the visual narrative has been the primary source for film research. The picture in relation to the narrative has provided the basis to discover meaning in cinema studies, to the exclusion of any critical appreciation of sound (Sinclair, 2003: 17). This emphasis on the picture-narrative has evolved to such an extent that it has been claimed that most film theorists are 'deaf' (Stilwell, 2003: 74) and that film theory has been 'caught up on vision' (Kassabian, 2003: 74), the two camps of film theory and music/sound studies 'regarding each other across an abyss' (Stilwell, 2003:75). Although I agree with Stilwell and Kassabian that sound has been ignored, as I argue in Chapter One, the emphasis that scholars have placed on the visual has been limited to its function in relation to narrative and themes, looking *into* films rather than *at* them. Sound has been unheard in the same way that cinematography has been unseen. It is a paradox, therefore, that film theory not only appears to be blind to the visual, but also deaf to the aural. These impairments have consequently prevented a fully integrated critical analysis of music and cinematography.

The reasons proposed for the fissure Stilwell identifies between image and sound studies are varied. The editors of *The Velvet Light Trap* neatly sum up the situation as conflicts in ideologies and positions on making meaning (Stilwell 2003: 73). I would add that the abyss has opened because studies of sound and music are carried out almost exclusively from the perspective of post-production. This is understandable as the creative use of sound is produced by careful design and dubbing in post-production, rather than during recording. Sound, therefore, comes within the remit of the editor. Subsequently, discussion focuses on the soundtrack's relationship to the pace and rhythm of the image (the editing) and not its association with visual style (the cinematography).

Given the above, one might argue that to research and write an academic work on the cinematographer Gabriel Figueroa supports and continues a bias towards the visual. Surely, such emphasis on the image is to the detriment of the soundtrack? However, in the case of Figueroa's œuvre, an examination of

his visual choices in relation to the soundtrack, that is looking *at* the image, listening *to* the sound and then looking *into* the films, reveals new meanings that expose contradictions that have been previously elided. Further, if the visual-aural analysis is made from a transnational perspective, inconsistencies begin to converge. What emerges is a complex, yet more integrated, understanding of the mutability between film form, its ideological content and the wider, political context. I should like to suggest, therefore, that the critical gap between sight and sound might be bridged through an exploration of the cinematographer's work and its close interrelation with sound.

Each director's formal influences and chosen structuring devices informed Figueroa's visual style, together with the economic and political contexts in which the film was produced. Therefore, what follows is an examination of the transnational through the relationship of sound and cinematography in terms of form (the narrative structures and formal devices a film employs) and context (the political, economic and social environment in which a film is produced). This study will challenge the apparent hermetic nature of former critiques on sound and image whilst also breaking down the emphasis on the national in Mexican film studies.

It is useful at this point to give a brief resumé of how sound and its relationship to image and vice versa has been discussed and analysed to date. This provides the critical background from which I shall develop my evaluation of Figueroa's work in relation to the music in the film and the transnational implications that arise from the analysis.

### **Talking about Talkies**

While it has been acknowledged that there is much 'uncharted territory' in sound and soundtrack theory (Buhler, 2003: 77), to date, soundtrack has been discussed exclusively in relation to narrative. This has been in terms of diegetic (part of the action and heard/performed by the characters), non-diegetic (external to the action, unheard by the characters) or a combination of both, intra or extra-diegetic (from a source we do not see, but that we know to exist in the story, for example, a voice-over of a character).<sup>2</sup> Its status

established, sound is examined in relation to the construction of sequences and scenes and to wider themes, such as gender, identity or ideology. The result is an analysis of film that foregrounds the meanings contained in the juxtaposition between soundtrack and narrative construction. Therefore, in advocating the equal importance of sound in relation to the construction of narrative as a giver of meaning in a film, analysis remains blind to the visual content of individual shots in relation to that sound.<sup>3</sup>

Until the 1970s, critical evaluation of sound in film confined itself to two general areas. On the one hand, film music, and on the other, study of the economic, historical and social consequences of the introduction of sound. A few early practitioners/theoreticians, specifically the Soviets, wrote of the aesthetic influence of the new technology, focusing primarily on its effect on montage and the political consequences of synchronised sound. *The Statement* issued by Eisenstein, Alexandrov and Pudovkin in 1928 was wary of the potential use of sound as a propaganda tool instead of what they perceived as the more creative use of sound as an element of montage (Weis, 1985: 83-85; Thompson, 1980: 117-119). French filmmaker René Clair shared their anxiety. His concern was that the image would merely become a vehicle for words and that the 'world of dreams' that the silent cinema evoked would be lost (Weis 1985: 92-95). However, despite the critical attention to sound of these early filmmakers, renewed attention to the function of sound, with wider fields of investigation than former research, did not begin to emerge for another fifty years.

In 1980, the journal *Yale French Studies* dedicated a special issue to sound. The publication suggested new areas for sound critique. Rick Altman's introduction gives a succinct outline of the visual prejudice in film criticism, from Eisenstein and Bazin to Comolli, Metz and Baudry. He calls for a more 'integrated approach to the entire film experience', away from the perpetuation of image-oriented film criticism. Yet, ultimately, his proposition is to privilege study of sound in film, rather than develop a new integrated analytical paradigm (Altman, 1980: 2-14). It is significant that the essays that follow support his position. The issue of the British film journal *Screen*, devoted to

sound and published four years later, in June 1984, follows the same theoretical approaches as the *Yale French Studies* essays and does not address the interrelation of image and sound beyond montage. Subsequent to these dedicated journals came publications such as *Film Sound, Theory and Practice* (Weis, 1985) and *Cinema and Technology: Image, Sound, Colour* (Neale, 1985). The latter is exemplary in its analysis of the technical development of sound and the economic and aesthetic pressures that encouraged its development. However, Neale's clear account of how new visual conventions were established with the coming of synchronous sound, concentrates on issues of realism, the place of the spectator in relation to the narrative and the psychological effects of sound. Visual style is not considered.

In recent years, there has since been a steady consolidation of sound research. In 2003, an online discussion brought together leading scholars in sound and film studies. *The Velvet Light Trap*, the journal that organised the debate, subsequently published the discussion in issue 51. Since 1998, the conference 'The School of Sound', which as its title suggests brings together both theoreticians and practitioners for a wide-ranging series of debates and keynotes on sound as an academic discipline, as well as an industry practice. Selected papers from these conferences appeared as *Soundscape* (Sider, 2003). Significantly, the publication reveals that it has been film practitioners rather than theorists who have championed the intricate relationship between sound and visual style, the sound designer/recordingist and the camera operator/cinematographer.

In the book sound designer Randy Thom urges all involved in film production not to limit their thinking of the project in terms of their individual crafts, but rather to view themselves as filmmakers, with an appreciation for the other technical areas (Sider 2003: 123). David Lynch (who, it is important to note, calls himself a filmmaker rather than director) echoes this view and uses music on set during a shoot: 'It really helps everybody get into certain mood. It certainly helps the DP [director of photography] because if he hears a certain music you don't have to say "Peter, slow this pan down" he'll react to the pace of the music'. He sums up the relationship between sound and image as

"[B]eautiful. It has to do with all the parts coming together in a correct way. With sequences paced correctly and the sound and the picture working together, it becomes like music." (Sider, 2003: 51-52)

Figueroa's early work provides a useful example of how visual style planned in careful relation to music adds meaning to the film and propels narrative. Indeed, to open this discussion in relation to Figueroa is particularly apt. This is because before financial problems forced him to find a job as a photographer, he studied violin at the music conservatory in Mexico City. One of his first jobs as a second cameraman on *Viva Villa* (Howard Hawks, 1933) was to shoot with a hand-cranked camera on which he kept the necessary rhythm by singing the chorus from Verdi's *Il trovatore* (Issac, 1993: 19). Throughout his work with Fernández, a trio of musicians (*Las calaveras*) were permanently on set, playing to capture the mood of the scene between and during takes. In addition, these musicians featured frequently in the films. Indeed, his first film *Allá en el Rancho Grande* defined itself by its music and its title theme song.

### **Sound and Mexican Cinema**

To understand the close analysis of *Allá en el Rancho Grande* that will follow, it is necessary to first situate the film within the context of early sound production in Mexico. This reveals how the nascent industry was intricately bound up in economic and technological transnational links that consequently extended to the cultural influences and the politics of Mexican cinema.

By 1931, the Hollywood experiment to produce multi-language films was failing for reasons that have been well documented (López, 2000: 424; de los Reyes, 1987: 115-116; de la Vega, 1995: 79). In July that year, Baltazar Fernández Cué, a Hollywood dialogist for Spanish-speaking films, arrived in Mexico as part of a Latin American tour. He reported back that, because of its proximity to the US and the large number of Mexican nationals trained and working in Hollywood, there had never been a better time to start sound film production in Mexico. Fernández Cué's trip coincided with the introduction of a higher tax rate imposed on imported films by the Ortiz Rubio government. Hollywood's refusal to pay the tax made film exhibition in Mexico (90% of

which was composed of Hollywood products), come to an abrupt halt (de los Reyes, 1987: 117-118). Protectionist of the fledgling industry, the government blocked foreign competition. However, the industrial infrastructure was not yet in place and therefore there were not enough films made to fill the gap in the market. Certainly, this situation rapidly launched Mexican film production as an industry that paradoxically was and would continue to be dependent on the US and Europe.

Ironically, instead of reducing foreign interests in Mexico, by increasing taxation on foreign productions, the Ortiz Rubio government substantially increased them. The reality was that movie production in Mexico was already a transnational concern. Hollywood was the only training ground for aspiring Mexican technicians and actors and the new industry relied on the US to supply all its production equipment from the laboratory itself to lenses and moviolas (de los Reyes, 1987: 126-128). The first sound feature, *Santa*, was produced in Mexico only after its producer, Juan de la Cruz Alarcón, had failed to sell the rights to the major Hollywood studios (García Riera, 1992a: 48). The production imported Spanish director, Antonio Moreno, Canadian cinematographer, Alex Phillips and several actors who had trained in Hollywood, including the leads Lupita Tovar and Donald Reed. The Rodríguez brothers, who had been working in Hollywood, provided the sound equipment.

One of the most significant, yet rarely mentioned, influences on the newly established industry was radio and theatre entrepreneur Emilio Azcárraga Vidaurreta who exploited the technological and cultural links between radio broadcasting and film. Using his commercial interests in radio, he developed industrial relations that circulated music, narratives and stars between the two media (Hayes, 2000: xvii). Azcárraga had founded XEW, Mexico's first commercial radio station in 1930 and he rapidly acquired more stations along the Mexican-US border. He had been educated in the US and was familiar with US popular culture and commercial ventures. His marriage to the daughter of Patricio Milmo, whose banking firm had strong links to French capital, allowed him access to the finance needed to launch XEW (Hayes, 2000: 30).

More significant though, was Azcárraga's intimate connection with the US government backed giant Victor/Radio Corporation of America (RCA). As the company's sole agent in Mexico, Azcárraga had major interests in the growing media, including the film industry. Westinghouse, General Electric (GE), American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T) and United Fruits had formed RCA in October 1919 to control patents for their companies. In 1926, GE and Westinghouse decided to branch out into the production of content, as well as the manufacture of transmitters and receivers for the growing industry and consequently formed the National Broadcasting Company (NBC). Three years later, RCA joined forces with Radio Keith Orpheum (RKO) as a protectionist measure against the growing use of their rivals' technology in early sound films, radio networks, phonographs and record production. By 1930, RCA had passed into the hands of Chase Manhattan Bank and, as a result, under the influence of Rockefeller (Neale, 1985: 74-85). The main roots of the burgeoning sound film industry, therefore, reached over the border and deep into the US economy.

RKO and its primary financial backer Rockefeller, together with the company's Mexican partner Azcárraga, became central players in the development of the film industry in Mexico during the late 1930s and early 1940s. The Mexican government's early and badly timed rejection of US domination of Mexican film exhibition was, it would appear, only cosmetic. What the ensuing rapid growth of the national industry achieved was a dependency on international talent trained in the US, equipment produced in the US and the financial control of entrepreneurs, such as Azcárraga, whose intimate transnational business links would inform the development of Mexican media from the 1930s and 1940s to the present day (Hayes, 2000: xvii).

Hence, it is not surprising that such emphasis was placed on music in Mexico's early sound cinema. It complemented and supported the related financial interests of major transnational investors. Indeed, 85% of the films Figueroa shot in 1936-37 contained long musical sequences. Although there was a sharp decline in the number of productions that were dependent on diegetic music during the early forties, music remained a significant element in Mexican films



and was defined by the media as central to nationalist expression. It was certainly central to investment revenue in the related commercial radio and recording industries that linked directly to the US majors, such as RCA. One might conclude, therefore, that the musically dominated genre of the *comedia ranchera* was developed and encouraged in order to support the diverse, transnational media interests of the films' financial backers. The progenitor of this new, transnational, media-integrated genre was *Allá en el Rancho Grande*.

The *comedia ranchera* 'generously interspersed musical numbers punctuating a romantic story – typically a boy-meets-girl, boy-gets-girl story or a tale of rivals (best friends, brothers, cousins) vying for the favor of a beautiful girl' (Ramírez Berg, 1992: 98). Moreover, the genre is generally perceived as politically conservative particularly in terms of its portrayal and endorsement of an idealised pre-revolutionary past and sexual stereotypes, (Mora, 1982: 46-48). However, as I shall argue below, close examination of visual style in the musical numbers in *Allá en el Rancho Grande* questions the widespread assumption that this first *comedia ranchera* is reactionary and reveals more politically and socially ambiguous themes.

### ***Allá en el Rancho Grande* as a National Counterpoint**

Figuerola's début film was a commercial and critical success in Mexico and internationally. It led the way for Mexican cinema of the late 1930s in terms of content and style of production and created a new musical genre, the *comedia ranchera*. At the 1938 Venice film festival, it gained the award for 'overall artistic contribution' and that same year a subtitled version was released for the non-Spanish speaking market in the US, making it the first Mexican film to win an international prize and to be subtitled. Although it made good box office returns in Mexico, its gross revenue was not exceptional. Significantly, though, it was the first national film to make money and gain critical accolades in the international arena (García Riera, 1992a: 211-212). Figuerola's visual treatment played a large part in this success and communicated to the world an image of Mexico that was to influence the production and reception of Mexican cinema in the years to follow.



Set in a hacienda in an unspecified rural location, the film centres on the relationship of Cruz (Esther Fernández), a servant and José Francisco (Tito Guízar), the foreman of the ranch. The pair keep their love secret, as Ángela (Emma Roldán), José Francisco's godmother, hates Cruz, the girl she was obliged to adopt at the same time as her godson and his sister Eulalia (Margarita Cortés). Formerly treated as part of José Francisco's family, Cruz is rejected by Ángela and used as an unpaid servant. Ángela prostitutes Cruz to the *hacendado*, Felipe (René Cardona), a childhood friend and, indeed, blood brother of José Francisco. When Felipe realises Cruz's deep love for his friend, he does not pursue his *derecho de pernada* and escorts her home. However, the couple are seen and gossip soon spreads that Cruz has spent the night with *el patrón*. When José Francisco is told of this by his arch rival, Martín (Lorenzo Barcelata), he challenges Cruz and discovers the truth, that Ángela sold her to the *hacendado*. Felipe arrives, the whole story is told and all ends happily with a group wedding, in which the main characters are married. It is important to add that within the film, three characters perform central, satirical roles that throw the film's apparent themes into relief and provide the only overt transnational and political references. These are Florentino (Carlos López), who is set up as a drunkenly-committed communist and two minor characters, *el gringo* Pete (Clifford Carr), from Denver Colorado, friend and supporter of Felipe, and Venancio (Hernán Vera), the Spanish, wheeler-dealer, bar owner.

A key film not only in Figueroa's filmography, but also within the history of Mexican cinema, *Allá en el Rancho Grande* has been identified by critics as being contradictory and conflictive in terms of what the Cárdenas *sexenio* (1934-1940) represented and proposed (García Reira, 1992a: 213; López, 2000: 426-427; de los Reyes 1987: 145). Released at the time when the government initiated agrarian reform, a major part of which was redistribution of the *latifundios*, the idealised vision of hacienda life in the film, with its inherent caste system and outmoded traditions, appears anachronistic and reactionary. Although critics remark upon this inconsistency between the political context and the ideological content of the film, to date there has been no analysis of why such a rupture should occur.

Aurelio de los Reyes (1987: 142-154) discusses the transnational structural forms and influences that guided the film, yet does not address how these relate to the reactionary content he and other critics perceive in the film. De los Reyes suggests that the precedents for *Allá en el Rancho Grande* and subsequent *comedia ranchera* were to be found in popular theatre. He cites musical comedy and theatrical review as influential in the structure and content of the genre and particularly points to the Spanish light opera tradition, *zarzuela*, for the way in which songs are intrinsic to narrative and action in the film. García Riera also observes that the narrative was based on an earlier silent film *En la hacienda* (Ernesto Vollrath, 1921) that, in its turn, was based on a Jaliscan *zarzuela*, with the title of *Rancho Grande* (García Riera, 1992a: 212).

Traditionally, *zarzuela* is neither opera, nor a play. Imported to Mexico in the colonial period, the classical *zarzuela* is a mix of sophisticated musical ensembles and arias, verse and prose dialogue, popular songs and comedy characters. It is neither purely folkloric nor high art, considered too populist by some and too classical by others. The genre is divided into two types, the *género grande* which are longer and more operatic in scope than the *género chico* which are shorter comedies. The genre became popular throughout New Spain and combined all the elements of the Spanish model, but with local characters, music, dances and political perspectives (Webber, 2003). But neither de los Reyes nor García Riera acknowledges that in the colonies *zarzuela* quickly developed into a form of satire against the ruling colonial classes. Indeed, it was the most popular and often only form of political protest (Sturman, 2000). Acknowledging the satirical role of the *zarzuela* and the close association of *Allá en el Rancho Grande* with the form, consequently throws a new perspective upon the film and on the readings that emerge from close analysis.

### **The *Género Chico* at the *Rancho Grande***

*Zarzuela* was essentially character driven. De Fuentes worked with renowned, sardonic theatre review writer Guz Águila (Antonio Guzmán) and centred the

plot around a *charro*, José Francisco and *china poblana*, Cruz. These archetypes of Mexican masculinity and femininity had been central to the *Campañas Nacionalistas*. This four-year campaign from 1931-1935, to promote 'valores nacionales' included one week of every month as the *Semana Nacionalista*, intended to endorse and encourage national productivity. The parades that initiated the national weeks were led by members of the *Comité General de la Campaña Nacionalista*, who would ride up front, dressed as *charros*, accompanied by women in the distinctive traditional costume of the *china poblana*. Even national days dedicated to the *charro* and *china poblana* were introduced (Pérez Montfort, 1994: 128).

The image of the *charro* and his *china poblana* had come to characterise 'lo mexicano' throughout the 1920s. What they represented was a hybrid representation of the west of the territory, in the form of the *charro*, and the east, the *china poblana*, united through the *son del jarabe*, a dance music prevalent throughout the republic. Consequently, regionalism was surmounted by a unifying national image (Pérez Montfort, 1994: 118-121). The *charro* and *china poblana* rapidly became representative of Mexican masculinity and femininity. The typical *charro* was characterised by his heavy drinking, playfulness, national pride, romantic prowess, chivalry, strength and sense of justice. This male image integrated notions of manhood, nation and power. The *china poblana*, on the contrary, was a timid, discreetly flirtatious, yet silent victim (Pérez Montfort, 1994: 126; Nájera Ramírez 1994: 1-5, Mora, 1982: 56).

It is significant that the post-revolutionary, commercial film sector drew on the satirical, anti-establishment popular form of *zarzuela* and the nationalist stereotypes of the *charro* and *china poblana*. By contrast, state-sponsored films, such as *Redes* (Fred Zinneman and Emilio Gómez Muriel, 1934) and *Rebelión* (Manuel Gómez, 1934), celebrate the politics and perceived economic progress of Mexico under Cárdenas, incorporated what have been called 'first class, artistic antecedents' (de la Vega, 1995: 83). These are defined by de la Vega, in agreement with many other critics, as the work of Eisenstein, whose Mexican project *¡Que viva México!* is seen as seminal to the

post-revolutionary, nationalist aesthetic. And whereas critics and commentators deride the more populist influences, adopted by the commercial producers, as reactionary and colonial (whilst not acknowledging the possibility of subversive satire in the films), the transnationalism inherent in the artistic influence of Eisenstein *et al* is applauded as progressive and paradoxically, national. This contradiction in the perception of diverse transnational aesthetic precedents has not been explicitly addressed as an issue in the development of Mexican cinematic culture. De los Reyes foregrounds it, but ignores the satirical content of adopted colonial forms and draws no conclusions. Most others concentrate on the artistic, rather than the populist, influences and, in so doing, avoid the issue altogether. What this points to is that many critics and commentators choose to disregard or deny the transnational foundations upon which the Mexican industry was established.

Having identified the transnational economic and cultural contexts of *Allá en el Rancho Grande*, I shall now move on to illustrate how this context is evidenced in the visual style of the film. I will focus my study on two musical sequences. Figueroa's cinematographic rendition of the songs in these sequences reveals how closely the visual style and music work together in the film to create meaning and propel the narrative. The first introduces Cruz and Martín, José Francisco's rival and the second, which is also the last musical scene in the film, contains two songs sung by José Francisco, the theme tune to the film and the *huapango* singing duel with Martín, brings the film's narrative to a climax. The analysis raises some significant points with regard to the choices taken by Figueroa in the visual representations of Cruz and José Francisco, the heroine *china poblana* and the hero *charro* of the narrative. Combined with the lyrics, these expose the underlying and undermining function of transnationalism on representations of the national and reveal rifts and fissures in nationalist ideology itself.

### **Dissonance and Displacement**

*¡Qué lejos estoy del suelo donde he nacido!*  
*Inmensa nostalgia invade mi pensamiento,*  
*y al verme tan sola y triste cual hoja al viento,*

*quisiera llorar, quisiera morir de sentimiento.*

*¡Oh! tierra del sol, suspiro por verte.*

*Ahora que lejos yo vivo sin luz, sin amor,*

*y al verme tan sola y triste cual hoja al viento,*

*quisiera llorar, quisiera morir de sentimiento*

Cruz's song (*Canción Mixteca*, composer, J. López Alavés)

Commenting on the visual style of *Allá en el Rancho Grande*, de los Reyes simply comments that the camera in the film 'forgot its job' during the songs and assumes the traditional position of a theatre audience (de los Reyes, 1987: 146). It is, however, apparent on viewing these scenes that Figueroa's placement of the camera and the composition of the frame is dynamic, considered and carefully integrated with the lyrics and music.

In the film, diegetic music accounts for 22 minutes and 28 seconds of screen time. This is broken down into three long musical-based sequences: the serenade sequence (6'25"), the cockfight sequence (6'05") and the cantina sequence (which includes the theme song) (6'05"). In addition to these long musical sequences, Cruz's song, the first music heard in the film, runs at 1'40" and counterbalances the final wedding scene that is a reprise of the theme song at 1'15" long. These two short sequences provide a musical overture and coda in the film and reflect the structure of the *zarzuela* form. Significantly, there are no orchestras situated outside of the diegesis that produce the intra/extra-diegetic tension present in the majority of musical sequences in Hollywood films of the 1930s. Indeed, at no point is any off-screen instrumentation used. Music is produced entirely by the characters present on screen. The only exception is three minutes of extra-diegetic music over landscape shots and the introductory poster to the cockfight. This overwhelming weighting in favour of music performed exclusively by the characters suggests that songs and music are pivotal to their development and, furthermore, that music performs a significant narrative function.

Most music in films of the 1930s, and indeed in contemporary cinema, is extra-diegetic. After the shoot, the composer views the film during post-production and constructs the score to the edited material. Subsequently, the music is often released commercially as the film soundtrack. As discussed earlier, over the past twenty years, there has been a steady interest by both musicologists and film scholars, in the study of film music. However, the focus to date has been precisely upon the film score, and the extra-diegetic function of music in a film. There has been little consideration of the role of diegetic musical sequences, outside of studies on the Hollywood musical. However, *Allá en el Rancho Grande* was not conceived or produced as a musical. Despite the large percentage of music in the film and unlike a film score, the songs in *Rancho Grande* were central to and present within the initial concept of the film and the film script, just as they would be in the satirical *zarzuela*.

According to both Gorbman and de los Reyes, songs are a pause in narrative development rather than an extension of it, a frozen moment in film time (Gorbman, 1987: 20; de los Reyes, 1987: 146). However, far from bringing the narrative to a halt, the songs in *Allá en el Rancho Grande* accelerate it and function, as they would in *zarzuela*, to propel the action. From pre-production, Figueroa was fully aware of each song's place within the story and its narrative function. As they were performed on set to playback, Figueroa would have planned his visual treatment of musical sequences as he would any other sequence. It therefore follows that he considered the visual style as carefully for the songs as for the non-musical scenes. Figueroa organised the composition, lighting, choice of lens and framing through close communication with the director de Fuentes, in order to correspond with the meanings and/or theme, whether explicit or implicit, contained in the scene. Rather than freezing the action, or positioning the camera to reflect the traditional placing of a theatre audience in the scenes, as suggested by Gorbman and de los Reyes, Figueroa's visual treatment of songs in *Rancho Grande* melts and blends themes and motivation, propelling both characters and narrative.

Throughout the sequence that introduces the adult Cruz, a typical *china poblana*, with her embroidered blouse and long plaits, the character's nostalgia

at her loss of homeland and her sense of entrapment is expressed through a close configuration of the music and the visual style (DVD clip 1). The sequence is simply constructed around five shots: an interior wide-shot, a mid-shot of Cruz left of frame, a mid close-up profile of Florentino, right of frame, and two exterior mid-shots. In the composition of the establishing shot, Figueroa positions the camera to place Cruz and Florentino on the same plane of perspective. The framing, however, with the table, basket and a potted geranium on varying planes in the foreground and the bench in the background, provides visual layers of light and dark which provide depth to a potentially flat composition. The geranium at foreground right acts as a visual counterpoint for Cruz, balancing the frame. But what is most significant about this framing is that it forms one point within a triangle of three compositional elements. Cruz and the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe on the back wall establish the other two points. The Virgin is placed at the apex of the triangle, Cruz and the geranium are positioned at the base. This visual dynamic created by Figueroa excludes and dominates the seated Florentino and serves to emphasise the relationship between Cruz and the Virgin.

Read from a purely aesthetic point of view, the triangular composition of this shot balances the frame, provides perspective and functions to establish a classical vanishing point to the rear of the frame. More significant though, is Figueroa's choice and organisation of the archetypal symbols, the Virgin of Guadalupe and the geranium, in relation to Cruz. The alignment of Cruz with the Virgin occurs in other scenes in the film, most evidently in the scene in Felipe's office. However, it is in this early scene edited to Cruz singing the lines, 'Qué lejos estoy del suelo donde he nacido, inmensa nostalgia invade mi pensamiento', that Figueroa's visual design of this wide shot establishes meaning for both the development of the Cruz's character and wider issues in the film, notably the notion of displacement.

In the film's narrative, Cruz was born, together with José Francisco and Eulalia, at the neighbouring hacienda, the *Rancho Chico*. As children they were brought by their godmother and Florentino's partner, Doña Ángela, to live at



entire window. The vertical iron bars accentuate the entrapment created by the composition and lighting, which is further underlined when Martín enters. Whilst Martín is in the bright sunny exterior, Cruz remains framed in the dark interior. In the compositional flow between the Virgin and Cruz established at the beginning of the sequence, Figueroa sets up an internal conundrum in the film. With the creation of a clear link between Cruz and Guadalupe, *la Patria* paradoxically becomes a nation displaced. In the track back that frames Cruz behind bars, the visual metaphor extends to a nation trapped between darkness and nostalgia.

Moreover, when the film is approached from a transnational angle, issues emerge that have not been acknowledged in earlier analyses of the film. The view to date is that *Allá en el Rancho Grande* was a deliberate statement in opposition to the practices of the Cárdenas regime (de la Vega, 1995: 83; García Riera, 1992a: 236). But this assumes an interpretation of the Cárdenas policies as being radically national and left-wing. Certainly, with the election of Cárdenas and the exile of Calles in 1936, it appeared as if the *maximato* was at an end and a new direction would open for Mexico, in line with the aims of the 1920s. However, two powerful groups remained in Mexico whose agenda was far from radical. On the one hand, there was the old-monied, Catholic right, the majority of whose Mexican lands and business interests were expropriated in the name of the state, yet who had diversified their assets and interests to retain power through economic control (Hamilton, 1982: 35-40; Wasserman, 1987: 90). On the other hand, there was the new entrepreneurial class, the 'revolutionary capitalists' (Hamilton, 1982: 43), made up of men such as Aarón Saenz, revolutionary-turned-governor-turned-entrepreneur and business men such as Azcárraga, with their cartels and links with US and European commerce.<sup>5</sup> Both groups were in opposition to state ownership, seeing it as a threat to inherited wealth, private enterprise and an obstacle to the drive for free market capitalism. Indeed, 'already in the 1930s negotiations were underway for investment projects combining foreign, state and private national capital' (Hamilton, 1982: 51).

Meanwhile, Cárdenas, despite his proclaimed goals of 'state ownership of the means of production' and a 'workers democracy as the first step towards socialism', believed that the government should act in a conciliatory role between conflicting classes and ideologies in the interest of national development. Indeed, in February 1936 he stated, 'The government desires the further development of industries within the nation, since it depends on their prosperity for its income through taxation' (Ashby, 1967:33-34). What Cárdenas consolidated, therefore, and what, for the next seventy years of its rule, the Party built on, was a politics of containment for socialist capitalism, with an implicit understanding that there should be as much socialism as necessary and as much capitalism as possible. As a result, the structure of Mexican politics necessitated multiple ideologies that could work in parallel to support and contain the conflicting interests within the state economy.

The expression of displacement of *la patria* so subtle, yet nonetheless apparent, within *Allá en el Rancho Grande* could, therefore, be read as a reflection of the inconsistencies in the early years of the Cárdenas regime. On one hand, there was the drive towards a socialist-based, state-owned national economy that rejected past hierarchies and external intervention. On the other hand, there was the encouragement of transnational alliances and investment in profit-oriented industries such as radio, press and film to increase national revenue. Between these two goals, who, what and where was Mexico?

Cruz/*la patria* is at once revered and imprisoned in an idealised, feudal system, set in a remote, geographically unspecified region. She is the victim of the film, both in the hands of the peons/proletariat, represented by the wicked stepmother Ángela, who treats her as a slave and literally, in the hands of the dominant land owning class, Felipe, the *hacendado* who attempts to rape her. She has no place or status in the microcosm of society that the *Rancho Grande* represents. She longs for a return to a home that is unspecified and distant. The identity of 1930s Mexico, emerging from the violent conflicts of civil war and foreign intervention to the uncertain consequences of transnational, socialist, venture capitalism was also lost with no single ideological home base. Figueroa in his visual rendition of Cruz's song subtly expresses the ambiguity

felt by the internal conflicts in contemporary politics and economics. This uncertainty is developed further in the visual treatment of the cantina sequence.

### **Discord and Destabilisation**

In the *huapango con contestación* between José Francisco and his arch-rival Martín, the foreman becomes ostracised from the community and his status is questioned and threatened, all of which is reflected in the cinematography. On his success in the horse race against Rancho Chico, the newly appointed foreman of Rancho Grande, José Francisco, celebrates in the cantina. He immediately announces his forthcoming marriage to Cruz. His announcement is met with silence. Cruz was seen with Felipe, the *hacendado*, while José Francisco was away at the Rancho Chico and it is assumed that she has willingly spent the night with him. José Francisco, momentarily confused by the reaction of the men, breaks the tense silence by cajoling the crowd to cheer. Someone requests a song and José Francisco takes up his guitar. This cues the theme tune of the film. Significantly, the song *Allá en el Rancho Grande* is positioned late in the film, as part of the scene that sets up the final, dramatic climax of the narrative. However, in the duet that follows, the foreman's rival Martín immediately questions the role the song plays as the hacienda community anthem and the implicit inclusion of José Francisco within its society. The effect is an overt destabilisation of the foundations of the community, a displacement similar to that suggested by Figueroa's visual treatment of Cruz's song.

Figueroa develops the sense of non-belonging and dislocation throughout the scene by the consistent juxtaposition of compositionally balanced shots with set ups that subvert or disrupt classical composition and perspective. Certainly, in the establishing wide shot of the cantina, the inversion of the traditional vanishing point is similar to Atl's inversion of linear perspective, as discussed in Chapter Two. This opens out the composition to suggest space outside and beyond the frame. In the cantina it suggests the frame, indeed the film, cannot contain the potential of action and narrative. This gives an uneasy tension to the shot. The inverted perspective and composition communicates latent disruption. The following shot is a typical example of a conventional linear

composition, which inverts the compositional elements of the shot preceding it. Venancio, the *cantina* owner forms the apex of a mid-shot, triangular composition, the two angles of which are formed by the line of the mens' hats and paralleled by the positioning of their arms towards the bottle on the bar and Venancio. However, figures wipe the frame constantly, moving in front of and behind the action, to compress the composition and extend the action outside of the frame. Emeterio's news that Cruz has been seen with Felipe, is shown in a brief montage of mid close-up shots of men in the bar as they repeat Cruz's name and the phrase 'con el patrón'. The news creates tension, disapproval and speculation. Hats and parts of faces and hands impinge on the outer edges of each shot. The montage edit gives the impression that the news is running around the cantina. Together with Figueroa's decision to disrupt the edges of frame, the sense of tension created in the opening wide-shot is brought to a head.

The friction established by the subtle disruption of visual perspective and balance, the placement of the camera, the framing and lighting, as José Francisco emerges from the shadows and enters the cantina, creates further suspense. Although the feeling of the crowd that engulfs José Francisco at this point is genial, the framing and composition places him in a vulnerable position. When he announces Cruz's name, he is in mid close-up. There is no focal depth in the shot, indicating that Figueroa chose a lens with shorter focal length. The effect is to isolate José Francisco from the crowd that responds to his announcement with a stony silence. José Francisco, momentarily taken aback, cajoles the men into cheering. They then ask for a song.

Having set up tension in the preceding sequence of shots, Figueroa now makes bolder compositional choices in the way in which he shoots the two musical numbers that follow. These two songs are central to the meaning of the film. The first is the theme song *Allá en el Rancho Grande*, the second is the *huapango con constestación*, between José Francisco and Martín, during which Martín reveals the news about Cruz and Felipe. There is a distinct development in visual style throughout the two songs that underlines the

increasing tensions that come to a head at the end of the *huapango* (DVD clip 2).

During José Francisco's rendition of the theme song, the first five shots of this twenty-three shot sequence intercut a mid-shot and a reverse shot of José Francisco, showing the crowd of men listening, with a three-quarter profile, high-angle shot of the foreman surrounded by a sea of round hats. The composition in each of these shots is balanced, privileging José Francisco and emphasising his central position and role within the hacienda community and the narrative. This opening establishes a link between the lyrics and meaning of the song to the character. José Francisco is part of Rancho Grande.

*Allá en el rancho grande,  
allá donde vivía,  
había [sic] una rancherita,  
que alegre me decía.*

This is subsequently underlined by a series of six shots juxtaposing close-ups of men, who interject questions between the lyrics to push the song's narrative along, against the established mid-shot of José Francisco.

*Te voy hacer tus [sic] calzones (¿cómo?)  
Como los usa el ranchero.  
Te los empiezo de lana (¿y luego?)  
Te los acabo de cuero.*

De Fuentes, who edited the film as well as directed it, builds a rhythm which is paralleled in the visual style through a set of similar close-ups intercut with José Francisco's main mid-shot during the verse. The repeated use of these close-ups and the mid-shot demonstrates the centrality of José Francisco within the mise-en-scène and the hacienda society. The following verse follows the same editing pattern. However, the shot of José Francisco is now a mid close-up which is intercut with close-ups of three other men, once more shouting comments in reply to the lyrics.

The two series of shots build a frank and open camaraderie between the men and José Francisco in distinct contrast to the silence that has just met him on his announcement. The tension would appear at this point to have been resolved. However, the penultimate shot is a profile, low-angle of José Francisco. From this angle, José Francisco's position up above the men is emphasised but, significantly, he is positioned in the third-left of frame in opposition to the men who take up two thirds of the right of frame in a semi-circle around him. Venancio, his back to camera, is positioned bottom-left of frame just behind José Francisco to balance the figure in right-hand bottom frame, but the composition also suggests that, rather than in control, José Francisco is actually surrounded and vulnerable. The final shot is an extreme high-angle down onto the entire crowd and José Francisco. Despite the communal singing and jovial gestures during this final chorus of the song, Figueroa's choice of angle exaggerates the foreman's vulnerability. From the high-angle he is a lone figure at bottom-left of screen, ensnared by three rows of men. Their circular composition is mirrored by their circular hats.

The lyrics of the theme song, the performance by José Francisco and its reception by the cantina audience, appear to affirm the foreman's kinship to the Rancho Grande and its community, his pivotal role at the hacienda reflected in the collective acknowledgement of his status. However, a closer examination of Figueroa's compositional choices in relation to the lyrics and the rhythm of the edit, exposes a tension. At this point in the scene, José Francisco is unaware of what has happened with Cruz. Therefore, suspense is created in both the audience at the cantina and the film viewer who have the information about Cruz but also know that José Francisco is unaware of what has happened. It is in the song that immediately follows the theme tune, where the tension reaches a climax and the news about Cruz is revealed.

The *huapango con contestación*, sung by two singers, works to a ten beat format and the singers establish and improvise the content. Martín is jealous of José Francisco who has been promoted above him to the job as foreman, won the inter-hacienda horse race and will marry Cruz, three of Martín's ambitions.

Bitter and jealous, Martín now sees a way to avenge himself. He is aware of the information about Cruz and uses it against José Francisco. But more significantly, he questions the status of the new foreman, his right to even call himself part of Rancho Grande, as he was not born at the hacienda. This situates José Francisco outside of the hacienda society and opens the way to question his ethics and his honour, two defining attributes of the *charro*.

The visual patterns built up during the previous sequence now develop further. Figueroa establishes the two men in compositionally balanced mid-shots, which intercut the first three verses at an even pace. However, in verse four Martín's response goes beyond the previously good-humoured, mutual criticism, to suggest that José Francisco has lost his credibility and reputation.

*Las lumbres que yo he prendido no las apaga cualquiera (repeats)*  
*No todos somos iguales andando en la quemadera*  
*Yo conozco caporales que se queman en la hoguera*

Before this verse, Figueroa places the camera at an extreme high-angle of the entire group. A sea of hats surrounds José Francisco at the bar, left of frame and Martín stands right of frame. There is a clear line of figures between the two men watching them closely. Figueroa's choice to use such an extreme angle underlines the subtext of Martín's verse. The angle has the effect of alienating the audience and setting the foreman within the context of the community. From this point on, as the criticisms become insults, Figueroa frames the shots more tightly. When José Francisco replies accusing Martín of envy, Martín is framed in mid close-up in frame.

*Hay uno que en el cantar da su envidia a conocer (repeats)*  
*Por que no fue caporal ni lo quiso una mujer*  
*Corrió al palomo tan mal que al patrón hizo perder*

Figueroa uses a short, focal-length lens that cuts detail from the background to isolate him in shot. The sudden silence of the cantina together with the tight framing take the sequence away from a jovial group entertainment to a

metaphorical duel between the two men. Martín replies with a verse that breaks with the established *huapango* structure.

*Vale más saber perder y guardar bien el honor  
Con la mujer que uno quiere, no hay que hacer combinación  
Si pierdo revancha tomo y a la Cruz de mi pasión  
Por un caballo palomo no se la cambio al patrón*

The sequence climaxes with this accusation in a close-up of José Francisco's face. His expression turns from bewilderment to anger. Figueroa positions Martín in a wider mid-shot, central to frame and in control. As the foreman jumps down from the bar in the following shot, he destroys the balance of the frame that has been established around him. The composition is set off-centre and, surrounded by the men in the cantina, José Francisco suddenly appears vulnerable in contrast to the strong composition that favours Martín in the preceding shot.

As in Cruz's song, issues of status and belonging are brought to the fore. During both of the cantina songs José Francisco's right to be in Rancho Grande, his status, ethics as foreman and honour as a man at the ranch are questioned. He is an outsider. Although he feels he belongs and is accepted, the lyrics of the *huapango* and the way in which Figueroa develops the composition, reveal an underlying rejection of José Francisco, the ultimate *charro*.

It could be argued that the 'happy ending' to the film offers narrative closure and resolves the issue of José Francisco's displacement through his reconciliation with Felipe and the subsequent final, jaunty wedding scene that reprises the film's theme tune. However, an examination of Figueroa's visual design in these two final scenes undermines the apparent resolution of the themes of belonging and identity offered by the narrative.

Throughout the confrontation with Felipe, Figueroa frames José Francisco and Cruz in opposition to the *hacendado* and the members of the Rancho Grande



community who surround him in frame. The reconciliation brings the two men only briefly into a two-shot before cutting to the final scene. In the brief wedding sequence that ends the film, the characters emerge from the church after a communal marriage ceremony accompanied by the theme song of the film. The first couple to enter and exit frame are Felipe and Marcelina (Dolores Camarillo), followed by the *charro* José Francisco and *china poblana* Cruz. Significantly, Jose-Francisco's sister, Eulalia exits with the *hacendado* of the Rancho Chico, Don Rosendo, demonstrating her return to Rancho Chico. The last couple Angela and Florentino, who have lived together unmarried for years, exit last. The couples enter and leave frame quickly. There is no moment in which any couple is in frame with another. Far from presenting reconciliation and transformation, the class and hacienda hierarchy remain unchanged, with the *hacendado* and his new bride leading the procession from the church and Florentino and Ángela coming last.

Figuerola positions Cruz and José Francisco apart from the wider community of Rancho Grande in these last two scenes of the film. He visually underscores their narrative and symbolic function in the film, made transparent through the confrontation with Rancho Grande's Felipe and the marriage of Eulalia with Rancho Chico's Don Rosendo. These two scenes are a culmination of Figuerola's compositional leitmotifs throughout the film that displace Cruz, the *china poblana* and José Francisco, the *charro*, the principal male and female Mexican archetypes. The doubt expressed about their status raises, but does not fully resolve, fundamental questions on the nature of identity and place. Who belongs in Mexico? Who is Mexico? Indeed, what is Mexico?

### **Transnationalism Composed**

Opening one's eyes to visual style and one's ears to diegetic music to offer an integrated analysis of sight and sound in *Allá en el Rancho Grande*, reveals meanings in the film not previously explored. This approach, together with an acknowledgment of the transnational economic and cultural contexts surrounding the film, facilitates an appreciation of the film that goes beyond the reactionary and regressive label granted by film scholars.

Scholars have noted contradictions in the film, but the fundamental causes for such inconsistencies are left unexplored or are explained away in non-empirical terms that elide the transnational. The tendency by critics to approach Mexican cinema from a national perspective, rather than through an examination of the intrinsic transnational economic and cultural elements in film production, contains and suppresses the political complexity of films such as *Allá en el Rancho Grande*.

My reading of *Allá en el Rancho Grande* has endeavoured to transcend the previous socio-historical accounts that classify (and dismiss) the film as post-revolutionary, nationalist propaganda. The analysis has highlighted the contradictions encountered by such approaches and how they explain away these paradoxes by the use of non-empirical stereotypes, based in vague concepts such as *mexicanidad*, as discussed in Chapter Two. Through an approach that is based on visual-aural analysis within an understanding of the film's wider, transnational contexts, rifts in the nationalist agenda begin to open up. Moreover, a complex, yet more cohesive understanding of the inherent contradictions in the film and post-revolutionary ideology emerges.

It cannot be known whether de Fuentes and his co-writer Guzmán Águila, in choosing to structure the film on the popular, transnational form of *zarzuela*, were intending to produce a satirical comment on contemporary Mexican politics and society. Certainly, one may interpret the film as a visual and narrative parody of Mexico, a lampoon of the contradictions in its contemporary economic and social policies. In the wake of the *Campañas Nacionalistas*, the four-year campaign for national values, initiated by Ortiz Rubio and Abelardo L. Rodríguez in 1931, it may well be read as such. The Cárdenas government initially distanced itself from the overt nationalist celebration of everything Mexican that the *Campañas* introduced. However, adoption of the *china poblana* and the *charro* as central to national character, 'nuestro *charro* exhibe todo lo bueno y todo lo malo que llevamos dentro [...] anima nuestra vida y forma nuestra Patria' (Pérez Montfort, 1994: 128), was, by the time of the expropriation of the oil companies, adopted. Indeed, the

*charro* and *china poblana* became central to the nationalisation programme's propaganda machine (Perez Montfort, 1994: 128-130).

De Fuentes chose to take the *charro* and *china poblana* stereotypes and develop them as the romantic central couple, José Francisco and Cruz. Figueroa, in close collaboration with the director, challenges their function as representatives of national character. In so doing, he presents Mexico as displaced and threatened, not only by foreign intervention, but by internal conflict. Transnational emasculation and national discord is accentuated by the secondary roles of *el gringo* Pete, with his bombastic support of Felipe and private enterprise and the caricatures of the drunken, weak-willed communist, Florencio and the Spanish, wheeler-dealer-cum-bar owner, Venancio. Moreover, the use of these characters indicates a highly stylised, satirical undercurrent running through the film. Certainly, de Fuentes and Figueroa would have been aware of the paradoxes in the Cárdenas regime's policies - of the apparent contradiction between, on one hand, socialist rhetoric, the expropriation of key industries and radical land re-distribution and, on the other hand, the encouragement of private, transnational enterprise with its consequent consolidation of established social hierarchies.

Whether consciously satirical or not, what the film acknowledges is that contradictions emerge as a result of transnational relations. These provoke complex and challenging issues to a nation. In the film, displacement of the nation's iconic image of itself, represented in the sequences analysed above through the *china poblana*/Guadalupe Cruz and the *charro* José Francisco, brings about questions in relation to Mexican identity. I would suggest that, through the visual style and its close working with the music and lyrics, the overt '*mexicanidad*' of the film itself proposes profound challenges to the very stereotypes it employs. It highlights the use of nationalist archetypes from a transnational view. It manipulates nostalgia and the past to present a parody of itself.

De Fuentes and Figueroa were sophisticated filmmakers and in the case of Figueroa, politically active. With their experience of the US, their privileged

status in Mexican society and their contacts with the entrepreneurial class who financed their films, they would have been acutely aware of the presence of transnational economic links in Mexico and their importance in the establishment and future development of the embryonic film industry. It is important to remember that the film was not hugely successful in the home territory and that it aimed itself unequivocally at an international market. Its employment of Argentinian and Hollywood star, Tito Guizar, de Fuentes's background in the US and Figueroa's training in Hollywood all informed the film's production and subsequent marketing. When viewed from such a perspective, *Allá en el Rancho Grande* transcends its reputation and becomes a complex exposition of contradictions in nationalist rhetoric and imagery that result from transnational relations. What *Allá en el Rancho Grande* recognises was that despite nationalist rhetoric, whether socialist or conservative, Mexico was inherently transnational.

In the following chapter, I investigate how Figueroa's representation of the rural space, so central to the *comedia ranchera* genre, developed and how, within the context of transnationalism, his rural images communicate complex issues around race, class and national identity.

---

<sup>1</sup> See also Poniatowska (1996: 17) and Pérez Turrent (1997: 10).

<sup>2</sup> See Percheron and Butzel (1980: 16-23) for an in-depth outline and analysis of diegesis and sound.

<sup>3</sup> See for example Chion (1982), Babington and Evans (1985), Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson (1985), Feuer (1993), Marshall and Stilwell (2000).

<sup>4</sup> See Brading (2001).

<sup>5</sup> See Hayes (2000: 33-34) for a synopsis of Azcárraga's relationships with RCA and NBC during the 1930s and early 1940s. For detailed studies of the relationship of state, private and foreign capital and the continuing hegemony of the ruling elite in Mexico see Bennett and Sharpe (1980). For an overview of Cárdenismo, how it has been represented and interpreted and the complex rise and fall of the Cardenas regime see Knight (1994). For an account of how the old dominant ruling class survived and joined forces with the new post-revolutionary elite see Wasserman (1987).

## Chapter Four

### Figueroa and the Rural Space

La naturaleza de Figueroa es una hermosa orquídea, sí, pero esa flor es carnívora y habría que enumerar miles de miradas turbias, vidriosas, espantadas, arrinconadas, enternecidas, fatales, ciegas, azarosas, asesinas y voluntariosas en el arte de Figueroa para darnos cuenta de la calidad de ese terror y fascinación ante lo que se mira y lo que se quiere crear al mirarlo por temor de que si dejamos de mirarlo, siga existiendo con nosotros y, si continuamos mirándolo, nos recupere, nos abrace mortalmente, nos reintegre al mundo de la naturaleza mexicana tan inmediata, tan recientemente vencida por la piedra y el jardín, por la mano de afuera y el papel sobredado.

(Carlos Fuentes, 1988: 29)

The meticulous visual management of the fictional rural space in Figueroa's images reflects the wider complexities of class, race and identity fundamental to the expression of identity in Mexico at the time he worked on the films. His cinematic construction of the country exposed the contradictions in ideology and politics that arose from post-revolutionary nationalist perceptions of the land and its inhabitants as fundamental to national identity. As a result, although Figueroa's images inform vernacular notions of national identity, they simultaneously exposed the fragile basis of its construction. Consequently, Figueroa's images communicate the paradoxical relationship between Mexicans, the government and rural space as one of constant vacillation between, on the one hand, control of the country and inclusion of its people and, on the other, fear of the land and alienation of its indigenous population.

This chapter starts with an overview of the contexts in which Figueroa constructed his rural images, followed by an outline of discourses on space in film scholarship. The subsequent close visual analysis of *Río Escondido* (Emilio Fernandez, 1948) demonstrates how Figueroa's images express the politics of space and the dominant position of the white Creole in the rural environment. I then go on to investigate Figueroa's representation of the Indian

in *Ánimas Trujano* (Ismael Rodríguez, 1961) as an expression of the use of Indian culture in the construction of national identity. Through close visual analysis of how Figueroa positions the Indian characters in relation to the Creole in the rural space, I suggest how a study of his cinematography exposes fundamental paradoxes in the construction of national identity that are a result of race and class hierarchies in Mexican society.

## Rural Contexts

Hay que decir que el creador de mis imágenes fue la naturaleza misma.

Gabriel Figueroa<sup>1</sup>

In her incisive essay on peasant politics during the Mexican revolution, Mary Kay Vaughan (1999) provides an overview of how historians, geographers and anthropologists have employed the concept of space in their studies of Mexico.<sup>2</sup> Their work covers a range of perceptions of how the Spanish colonisers and indigenous population used space; the way in which groups invested political and symbolic meaning into space; the physical occupation of space in relation to race, and also how space has been closely related to identity and expressions of power.

As cinematography is precisely the control and creation of space through choice of lens, camera position and light, it follows that Figueroa's work, by definition, expresses cultural notions of class, race, power and identity. As a consequence, the Mexican rural space Figueroa created for the screen was imbued with social and political meaning. As a result, the images Figueroa crafted informed the perception of Mexico by national and international audiences as they absorbed and accepted Figueroa's rural Mexico as the real Mexico, or at least the Mexico that could and should have been (Fuentes, 1988: 28-29; Monsivaís, 1988: 63).<sup>3</sup> The centrality of Figueroa's work in the formation of Mexico's image and identity positions it as the benchmark for cinematic images of nation throughout the twentieth century.

One member of the audience who was strongly affected by Figueroa's Mexican landscapes was the writer, Carlos Fuentes. In an exquisitely poetic homage to the cinematographer, *Una flor carnívora*, Fuentes articulates the intricate relationship between Mexican society and the land that Figueroa's images convey. Fuentes first experienced the cinematographer's work in Argentina and his recollection of the encounter is significant. He writes that *Flor silvestre* (Fernández, 1943) had an alarming and brutal impact on him and relates how Figueroa's portrait of rural Mexico was at once beautiful, violent and exotic (Fuentes, 1988: 28). Fuentes points out the artificiality of Figueroa's images and concludes that although Figueroa did not invent the landscape of Mexico, he did transform it.

Figueroa produced the majority of his rural images in the 1940s and 1950s, a period during which there was a huge increase in the already steady flow of migrants from the country to the cities. Indeed, between 1940 and 1970 the population of the metropolitan area of Mexico City increased by 424% (Davis, 1994: 329).<sup>4</sup> This was in large part due to changes in agrarian policy and the decisive move towards urban development during the period. Successive presidential regimes quickly reversed the Cárdenas government's shift away from the remaining landowning elites and *hacienda* systems and Ávila Camacho and Alemán both passed bills to reform Article 27 of the 1917 constitution that was the basis of land reform.

Briefly, the Article stated that the Mexican state, as representative of the Mexican people, owned all Mexican territory (both above and below ground). Therefore, embedded in Article 27 was the notion that ownership of place (Mexico) was connected to official notions of identity (being Mexican). Significantly, the changes to the bill privileged large agricultural businesses through exemptions to the land ownership clauses in the Article, whilst they simultaneously penalised the small, farming cooperatives of the *ejidos colectivos*. Consequently, from the mid-1940s and throughout the 1950s, vast tracts of Mexican territory reverted to large-scale agribusinesses, similar to those of the Porfirian *haciendas*, as a powerful elite claimed increasing amounts of land, forcing the small, communal farmers out of the market

through large-scale agricultural and industrial competition (Niblo, 1999:183-188).

As a result, the changes in land reform that were fundamental to the Mexican revolution were eroded by the drive towards a capitalist system and an urban, consumer society. However, the films of the period reinforced the intrinsic link between popular identity and the land as fundamental to national identity. Consequently, investigation of the cinematic landscape reveals an ideology formed within a paradox between the economic and social reality of the Mexican rural space and the imagined reality of Mexican national identity.

It was in this context that Figueroa produced some of his most iconic images. The visual rural space he created extended beyond a physical location of the films' narratives. His landscapes were more than images of the Mexican territory, they were spaces in which the social and political complexities inherent in notions of land, nation and self were played out. Aurelio de los Reyes has noted the geographical eclecticism of Figueroa's landscapes and has argued that the use of diverse locations that range from desert to rainforest, in films whose stories were actually based in only one place, was designed solely to appeal to international audiences and homesick Mexicans who had emigrated to the United States (de los Reyes, 1987: 162). However, the apparent lack of geographical and cultural specificity in the films is more convoluted than the post-revolutionary regimes' attempts to unify a disparate nation, or indeed, to produce a glossy advertisement for foreign investment and tourism, as suggested by de los Reyes.<sup>5</sup> I would suggest that the geographical ambiguity of Figueroa's landscapes actually reflects the ongoing transformation of the national territory due to the state's ambivalent approach to land management and ownership.

Given the political and social context of the films, Fuentes's suggestion that Figueroa's creation of Mexican rural space became embedded in national memory as a lost but not forgotten Mexico is certainly compelling. However, I would go further than Fuentes and argue that the Mexico Figueroa created for the big screen was not a lost bucolic idyll. His images were not memories of a



way of life and landscape consumed by capitalist progress. The Mexico seen through Figueroa's lens was not a remembered land because it had never physically existed. Rather than reconstruct actual Mexican topography, Figueroa used technology to manipulate the geographic place (the actual, physical location) to present a notional (the wider geographic, social and political dimensions that surround place), as opposed to an actual space. Therefore, the imaginary rural image that emerged through Figueroa's lens was as complex and contradictory as the political, economic and social contexts in which the films were produced.

Figueroa's landscapes vacillate between a celebration of idyllic, natural beauty and a vision of dangerous, unpredictable wilderness, populated by noble, beautiful Indians (who are, nevertheless, silent and motionless) or an angry, faceless mob.<sup>6</sup> On one hand, the rural space is beautiful and bountiful and Mexico is seen as a nation that encompasses many cultures and traditions which stretch over a vast terrain with potential to provide for the nation through agriculture and natural resources. On the other hand, it is an unstable space, physically difficult to navigate and control and inhabited by a population with a history of rebellion against the central authority of the state, or communities led by self-governing *caciques*, who control the local population by intimidation and force.<sup>7</sup> As a result, there is an underlying sense of unease and fear present in Figueroa's representation of the rural space. As I discuss in the close analysis below, the exaggerated darkness of the sky, produced with the use of red filters and manipulation of the negative in the laboratory, together with the extreme angles, emphasise the dominance of the natural topography to produce a fragility in the characters that are dwarfed in frame.<sup>8</sup> The juxtaposition of heavy shadow in contrast to bright sunlight produces a profound chiaroscuro effect, which in addition to texture and depth, gives a sense of duality and duplicity in the image.

The fear that Figueroa's landscapes communicate was, and indeed remains, a concrete reality that springs from a long history of armed uprising in rural areas.<sup>9</sup> Fuentes sums up the relationship of nature and history when he states, 'La naturaleza es el sitio de la historia y la historia es el sitio de la violencia'

(Fuentes 1988: 35). Indeed, the very title of his essay *Una flor carnívora* highlights the ambiguous relationship between beauty, fear and danger conveyed in Figueroa's rural spaces. Consequently, a paradoxical engagement with the Mexican landscape and its inhabitants emerges as a complex interaction between nature and history that expresses both fear and longing.<sup>10</sup>

Figueroa produced a large body of work on rural subjects. To give an extensive analysis of his visual construction of the rural space, in the context of the multiple issues that relate to land in Mexico would be a thesis in itself. I have chosen, therefore, to focus on two films whose narrative themes stem from contemporary policies on rural regeneration and to explore them in relation to issues of race and class. After a brief overview of the ways in which scholars have discussed landscape to date, I examine how Figueroa constructs the visual dynamic between the Creole characters in *Río Escondido* (Emilio Fernández, 1949) and rural space. I then go on to analyse how this relationship undermines the political rhetoric of the script and Miguel Alemán regime's attitude to rural education. In the discussion of *Ánimas Trujano* (Ismael Rodríguez, 1961) that follows, I study the Creole in relation to the Indian and how Figueroa's images express issues of power, race and class in the rural environment which both informed and were informed by a complex and contradictory construction of national identity.

### **Conceptualising Space: Written Interpretations of Place**

The perception of land/space and its role in society has created a substantial body of writing that straddles multiple academic disciplines, from the arts and humanities to the social sciences, and has taken a plethora of ideological and theoretical positions.<sup>11</sup> However, in film studies, analysis of the rural space has been curiously limited. Film scholars examine landscape predominantly in relation to the western and the road movie, in which it plays a central role. Yet, despite its centrality to these genres, there is a lack of engagement with the actual visual construction of the rural space and how it functions. There is a strange anomaly that although the narratives in both the western and the road movie take place in states as far afield as Montana, Wisconsin and Kansas, the majority of films in both genres have been shot in Arizona, Utah, California,

New Mexico, Colorado and north-west Mexico. A further paradox is that although Texas is the main location for the majority of film narratives, producers have rarely chosen to shoot in Texan locations (Buscombe, 1998: 120).<sup>12</sup> This suggests that although the narratives are geographically specific, as is evident in titles such as *The Santa Fe Trail* (Michael Curtiz, 1940), *Dodge City* (Michael Curtiz, 1939), *Drums Along the Mohawk* (John Ford, 1939), *Rio Bravo* (Howard Hawks, 1958), *Ride the High Country* (Sam Peckinpah, 1962), *The Far Country* (Anthony Mann, 1954) *High Plains Drifter* (Clint Eastwood, 1972), *Horizons West* (Bud Boetticher, 1952), *Red River* (Howard Hawks, 1947) and *Silverado* (Lawrence Kasdan, 1985) the landscape against which those narratives are set is imagined and highly constructed.

Because of this geographically imagined western space and the inherent links in the genre to Mexico, it is revealing to note the difference in the role and use of the West in US films in contrast to Figueroa's visual construction of rural Mexico. Ed Buscombe, a film scholar who has written widely on the western, states that landscape is:

[N]ever, or never for long, an object merely of contemplation.

Narrative is all. In a film, landscape becomes scenery in another, theatrical sense, a backdrop against which the action is played. In the western, that action frequently takes the form of a journey, landscape then becomes an obstacle which has to be overcome. Its beauty is incidental to its function as a test of the protagonists' characters.

[...T]he conquest of terrain is emblematic of the achievement of the individual in overcoming personal trials and is analogous to the wider victory of capital subjugating nature.

(Buscombe, 1998: 127)

Buscombe's summary is emblematic of how film scholars have discussed landscape primarily as a background element that supports narrative development. Clive Bush goes further to describe the western landscape as suspended 'between being and nothingness' (Bush, 1996: 167). He goes on:

The 'West' was technically perceived where the human eye never was. Stubborn detail, generalized effects, symbolic routes through symbolic terrain, the 'shot' of a landscape which always represented another landscape together with the camera which always lied are the essence of the landscape of the western.

(Bush, 1993: 168)

Therefore, Bush argues, the construction of the western landscape has been a necessary part of US nationalism, with the representation of the West providing a large, abstract, empty space against which frontier themes are played out. In other words, landscape is a blank screen onto which are projected the ideological and political themes played out in the western film's narrative.<sup>13</sup>

In the introduction to the special edition of *Screen* dedicated to space/place and the city (*Screen*, Autumn 1999), film scholar, Karen Lury and professor of geography, Doreen Massey, examine the study of space and place in film studies. Their conversation is a useful overview of how landscape has been discussed beyond the western and the multi-disciplinary work that has developed. However, their discourse also reveals significant gaps in the methodologies and theories used to examine space and place in cinema.

Massey rightly draws attention to the common yoking of space and place with the urban, an elision that suppresses and excludes consideration of other spaces such as the rural landscape. This she attributes to the close historical and social link between the growth of cinema and the modern urban experience. Consequently, this has led to a much larger concentration of study and analysis on the urban landscape in cinema, to the almost complete exclusion of the rural (Massey & Lury, 1999: 230).<sup>14</sup> However, despite Lury's passing reference to framing and mise-en-scène, there is no acknowledgment of the central role cinematography plays in the construction of space and place in the film image (Lury, 1999: 232-233).

The lack of engagement with visual style is indicative of the disregard within film scholarship of the actual construction of the image (the cinematography) in critical studies of space and place in film. Discussion of landscape in film, as is evident in scholarship on the western and road movie, has been predominantly rooted in methodologies that privilege narrative and elide detailed analysis of the cinematographic construction of space/place on the screen.

The absence of analysis on the cinematographic construction of rural landscapes is significant when one considers the importance of location and space as central to theories of mise-en-scène. To be sure, this is not to say that mise-en-scène critics have not discussed landscape, but rather that their discussion of it has been brief, with little analysis of the visual style that shapes its representation.<sup>15</sup> I would suggest that this lack of engagement with the cinematographic landscape in film studies occurs because although landscape, and especially the urban environment, is acknowledged, the visual construction of landscape has to date not been submitted to in-depth analysis, even in the genres of the western and road movie, where it is central to the film's meaning.<sup>16</sup> This is an issue that cinematographer James Wong Howe identified in the 1940s and his comment still resonates today:

The trouble with many critics and ex-critics is that for all their skillful talk they don't understand the techniques of motion pictures. They still criticize movies from the viewpoint of the stage. This results in any number of false appraisals, but the one which I am concerned here [sic] is that this approach leaves out the cameraman entirely

(Wong Howe, 1945: 419)

There are, however, notable exceptions to this paradoxical tendency to not see the visual in discussion of space in film. In his exploration of Paris in the films of immigrant German filmmakers, *City of Darkness*, *City of Light* (2004) and a related article (1999), Alastair Phillips employs close cinematographic analysis in his reading of the city and the way in which '[m]ise-en-scène does more than serve an empty formalistic argument, it also works to distinguish space (and

light) in gendered terms, and thus it separates not just bodies but ways of seeing the city' (Phillips, 1999: 271). Phillips's analysis opens up how visual style communicates the characters' relationships, not only to each other but also to Paris, through cinematographic manipulation of space in the framing, movement and lighting and how the visual relationship with the city informs and develops our understanding of character development. Moreover, Phillips goes on to situate visual style in relation to production contexts and to cinematic, artistic and cultural representation, to provide a holistic reading of selected films.

Phillips's relation of the city landscape to gender is paralleled in Julianne Pidduck's notion of a rural 'topographical lens', that considers how the gaze intersects with historical and contemporary discourses of class and colonialism through audiovisual language in television adaptations of Jane Austen novels. Her article examines space and the gaze, in relation to gender, class and colonialism, specifically interior/exterior/female/male placement and desire (Pidduck: 1998).<sup>17</sup> In contrast to Bush and Buscombe's view of the western landscape as a blank backdrop or narrative obstacle course for the main protagonist, Pidduck and Phillips highlight the complex construction of the landscape in relation to central themes of the films or television adaptations they discuss. Although there are limitations in their paradigms in relation to my own work on Figueroa, their full acknowledgement and use of the visual construction of space provides a useful starting point for reading the role and function of the Mexican cinematographer's construction of rural space.

### **Figueroa and Race/Class Topography**

In Mexican film, the gender issues on which Pidduck centres her argument are subsumed within the wider contexts of class and race. Whereas Pidduck is concerned with the relationship between space, location and gender in the English rural idyll, I shall use close analysis of Figueroa's visual style to examine the relationship of power, space, class and race within the rural Mexican landscape.

Unlike the gender/space disparities identified by Pidduck in British cinematic landscapes, in Figueroa's work male and female characters are, generally, spatially equal within the frame. The radical distinction between characters occurs in their placement and movement according to their racial and social position in relation to each other and the environment. Therefore, I adapt the space/gender dynamic identified and examined by Pidduck to an analysis of space/race/class dynamic in Figueroa's images.

There are compelling issues that arise in relation to Figueroa and the visual construction of gender. Moreover, given the historical dominance of male cinematographers and the dearth of female directors of photography in the film industry, analysis of cinematographic constructions of gender is a significant absence in film studies. However, whilst I acknowledge that such analysis is long overdue, I am also aware that there is a notable lack of *any* critical study of cinematography. My focus in this thesis, therefore, is to establish an approach to the construction of the cinematographic image, which will then provide the foundation for more specific studies of cinematography in relation to, for example, gender. It is also important to acknowledge that the class and race of a character affect Figueroa's representation of gender. Therefore, an evaluation of space/race/class is fundamental to analysis of gender in his work.

Given this intricate relation of gender with class and race, it is significant that Creoles, the white, ruling class, both female and male, are in positions of power, as the rural, landowning class in Figueroa's films that also inhabit the city. The Indians, both female and male, on the other hand, are the peons and are rarely represented in the urban space. However, female and male Mestizos inhabit both spaces. In the rural space they are the property-owning bourgeoisie, in the urban environment they are the proletariat. There are, nevertheless, a few exceptions. The María Félix character, Rosaura, in *Río Escondido* is a Mestiza/Creole teacher who finds herself transplanted to the desert. However, exceptions like Rosaura prove the rule, in that entrance to a space not associated with their social and racial position leads to the character's demise (in Rosaura's case her death) and/or reinforces their social and racial place. The analysis becomes even more complex when one considers that

Creole, Mestizo and Indian characters are all played by Creole or Mestizo actors. What develops, therefore, is a complicated conundrum of space and race whereby Mestizos/Creoles inhabit the urban, but also the rural landscape as Mestizos/Creoles masked as Indians.<sup>18</sup>

*Río Escondido* and *Ánimas Trujano* are key examples of how Figueroa constructed space in relation to contemporary social policies and political rhetoric on rural issues and how race, class and power functioned in provincial Mexico. Distinct from the Hollywood treatment of landscape as a dramatic backdrop, the function of which is to challenge and prove the protagonists' characters (Buscombe, 1998: 127), Figueroa transfigured the natural geography of Mexico into an artificial, highly visible presence. Fuentes defines this presence as the *flor carnívora*, a lyrical expression of the complex relationship between the beauty of the Mexican land and the perceived, unknowable threat of the rural environment. Figueroa's images situate the characters within this geographic and social dialectic, to create a dynamic relationship between individuals and the space around them. The land is not an empty terrain to be overcome and ultimately possessed as in the western, nor a scenic backdrop to political themes as in the road movie; rather, Figueroa's landscape interacts with the characters in the films. The dynamic he creates between space and the individual exposes the internal conflicts in the characters and the political complexities in the films' narratives and production contexts. As a result, he reveals the multifaceted social order of Mexico through relationships of dominance and powerlessness, both in the characters' relationship to landscape and to each other. Through camera position and the play between the contrast, light and texture of the image, Figueroa exposes positions of power and impotence that reflect the race/class hierarchy of Mexican society.

### ***Espacios virtuales: The Wide Closed Spaces of Río Escondido***

Figueroa no depende de una imposible 'estética nacional' sino de la avidez visual que reconoce fuerza artística en donde sólo se admitía la sucesión convencional de escenarios. Más que ningún otro



camarógrafo, Figueroa amplía territorios y presenta lo ocultado por el uso reverencial de la tradición.

(Monsiváis, 1988: 65-66)

*Río Escondido* was a triumph for Figueroa, for which he won his sixth international award for best cinematography at the Karlovy Vary film festival and gained his third consecutive Ariel in Mexico.<sup>19</sup> The didactic and rhetorical script written by Fernández and Mauricio Magdaleno, together with the active participation and support of the government, has led many film scholars to cite the film as an example of the nationalist style of filmmaking they perceive as synonymous with the work of Figueroa and director Fernández.<sup>20</sup>

The melodramatic narrative of *Río Escondido* is overlaid with nationalist declarations. When Rosaura opens the school she gives a speech on the Indian president, Benito Juárez, denounces oppressive *caciques* like Regino and lectures on the importance of justice and education as the way forward for the Mexican state. However, despite the overt nationalistic zeal of the film, I agree with historian Seth Fein that reading *Río Escondido* as nationalist is problematic (Fein, 1999).

Fein's research reveals underlying economic and political transnational links that challenge the accepted view of *Río Escondido* as a nationalist production. According to Fein (1999: 125-128), the film's themes supported the cultural project of an authoritarian Mexican state, which had a strong commitment to 'alliance with U.S. foreign policy and transnational capital.' Where I would diverge from Fein's thesis however, is his proposal that a cinematic 'idiom' was created, 'that concealed both the depth of the Mexican industry's transnationalisation and the broader structures that linked the government's project (not to mention the nation's development) to its northern neighbor, upon whose political support it depended' (Fein, 1999: 123-124). The basis of this national film language, Fein argues, was the visual style of the films. Hence, if Fein's analysis is followed through, Figueroa's cinematography functions to camouflage and distract attention from the intimate transnational

production links and the wider political and economic contact zones so fundamental to the Mexican government and the ruling elite.

Whilst I agree that *Río Escondido* is neither ideologically nor industrially opposed to the United States, I would challenge Fein's assumption that the film's visual style follows the classical Hollywood paradigm and that it conceals the transnational relations between the Mexico and the US. However, this is not to suggest that Figueroa's work is an example of the oppositional aesthetics proposed by Ramírez Berg in his nationalist formulation of the 'Figueroa-Fernández style', in which, as we have seen, he establishes a cinematic aesthetic of *lo mexicano* in opposition to Hollywood (Ramírez Berg, 1992 and 1994). Rather, I suggest, that on close analysis of Figueroa's work in *Río Escondido*, inconsistencies emerge that disrupt the Mexican government's agenda. Internal contradictions evident in the visual style of the film produce an unease that subtly undermines the script's central political message: that education is the way to bring the perceived primitivism of rural society into line with the progressive Mexican state.

The changes to Article 27 introduced by the Ávila Camacho and Alemán regimes to facilitate the growth of industrialised agriculture and to limit cooperative small-scale farming was indicative of the drive to bring traditional rural communities into line with the capitalist, liberal economic policies that were encouraged by transnational partnerships. However, rather than conceal these ideological and economic links with the US, as Fein suggests, Figueroa's images work to expose the complex consequences of transnationalism. The subtle, ever-present ambiguity between the bucolic and the threatening in the landscapes and the characters' relationship to it and each other, functions to unsettle the narrative and reveal the deep fissures in the nationalist rhetoric that are symptomatic of transnationalism.

*Río Escondido* opens with an inter-title that tells the audience that the following story is a chronicle of courage and of good overcoming evil. It also states that the themes are universal and therefore the film is not specific to contemporary Mexico. Paradoxically, this opening title cuts to general views

of the Zócalo (main square) of Mexico City. An ethereal choir sings the lyric 'México, México', as a male voice underlines, over shots of the national flag, the cathedral and the national palace, that this is the symbolic centre of power in Mexico. The sequence cuts to the interior of the palace to Rosaura Salazar, a young teacher, as she ascends the main staircase surrounded by Diego Rivera's murals and their leftist, idealised depiction of Mexican history. In a scene with President Miguel Alemán, who makes a significant cameo appearance that underscores the production's apparent allegiance to dominant political ideology, the President gives Rosaura a posting to the remote northern village of Río Escondido. As she hurries away to catch her train, the President says to his aide 'Esa niña es la Patria'.

Alemán's statement is central to the film. It establishes Rosaura/Félix as the personification of the motherland and as such she becomes a representative of a modern, democratic Mexico, dedicated to progress through education.<sup>21</sup> As such, she enters the rural space in order to bring a feudal, illiterate, pre-industrial society into line with the progressive capitalism of modern Mexico. As the motherland, Rosaura/Félix is both educator and reformer and her relationship with the indigenous population of the village is one of parent/child and embodies the patronising attitude of central government towards the non-urban population. The irony of this zealously nationalist opening can only be fully appreciated when seen in the context of its production.

Throughout the post-war period, Hollywood and the US State Department repeatedly defeated attempts by Mexican producers to develop the film industry. The brief and questionable collaboration between the Mexican and US industries during World War Two had metamorphosed into subtle control of Mexican products by Hollywood.<sup>22</sup> The structure of the national industry, with exhibition, production and distribution functioning independently did not help the situation as the disparate factions lacked a systematic network of mutual economic support. Moreover, national exhibition had been for some time, paradoxically, under transnational control. In addition to the turbulent series of post-war threats and concessions identified by Fein, which were a result of the assimilation process to re-assert US hegemony in the film industry

during the late 1940s, a more insidious and consistent transnational link is apparent.

Through his political and personal contacts, William Jenkins, the former US Vice Consul in Puebla throughout the 1930s and 1940s, had steadily formed a national monopoly on film exhibition that had important repercussions for the box office profits of Mexican films.<sup>23</sup> Simply put, if the US-born Jenkins did not agree to exhibit a film it did not make money. *Río Escondido* was produced, therefore, in a period of political and economic re-negotiation, during which the US and Mexican governments, businesses and individuals on both sides of the border wrestled for control. Hence, the definition of *Río Escondido* (in common with other films in the Fernández Figueroa partnership) as part of nationalist project has to be questioned and not only in terms of its contexts.

As discussed in Chapter Two, Figueroa's personal experience during and after the war mirrored the transnational dealings of industry and government. However, given that he was under Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) surveillance for over thirty years, his position was ambiguous. Set in this context, it is not surprising that tensions become apparent early on in *Río Escondido*. As the train pulls away, leaving Rosaura at her destination, Figueroa shoots her from a low-angle, medium close-up, against a dark, cloud-filled sky. As she turns to walk away into the strong wind, the camera pans to the left, revealing a vast, arid plain. The frame is adjusted with a slight tilt up to reposition the horizon mid-frame. Rosaura descends from the railway to the plain. Immediately, Figueroa's framing situates her in relation to the landscape. Rosaura's previous dominance of the frame changes radically as she walks away from camera. She becomes increasingly smaller, lost in the immense wilderness. The rain-like percussion on the soundtrack conveys the aridity and lifelessness of the deserted plain. Figueroa created the sense of limitless expanse and the ominous sky through the use of a 24mm, wide-angle lens to exaggerate perspective and worked with a complex manipulation of filters, film stock and aperture to exploit a full range of black and white tones,

that showed the deepest black and the brightest white, yet kept the full range of greys.<sup>24</sup>

As Rosaura walks across the salt plain, a tiny dot in the immense solitude, she and the audience enter a different world, a timeless space, where the heightened tragedy of the film is to be enacted (DVD clip 3). The wide angles, dutch tilts and downward movement in composition and camera, reflect the inaccessibility of the landscape and the rural situation that the young, urban teacher is entering. The small, remote, ruined town of Río Escondido adds to the sense of hopelessness. It is a lost place, hidden from, yet situated within Mexico by the opening scenes of the film.

Figuerola's use of wide lenses and a composition that sets the horizon low down in frame, particularly in the opening scenes of the film, create a curvilinear perspective.<sup>25</sup> *Río Escondido* is a good example of how Figuerola used perspective to create an atmosphere and tone that undermines the heavy-handed, progressive rhetoric in the film's dialogue. Whereas in traditional linear perspective, the eye is usually taken to the foreground figure(s) to give a sense of human control of the landscape, in Figuerola's frame the figures are incidental to a geography that engulfs and dominates the frame.<sup>26</sup> The wide angle and camera placement suggest, as do Atl's paintings, a different relationship to the Mexican landscape that cannot be expressed through conventional representation. This suggests a distinct appreciation by Figuerola (and Atl) that the rural environment was too historically, politically and socially complex to be articulated in rectilinear perspective.<sup>27</sup>

Figuerola's composition resonates with Atl's concept of *espacio virtual* in which the space beyond the plane of observation is recognized and acknowledged in relation to the *espacio real*, the space within visual range of the observer (Atl, 1934: 61). As Rosaura struggles across the open, desert plains, the horizon is framed lower and lower until it disappears completely and Rosaura is seen isolated, balanced on the bottom of frame against the sky, a small, distant figure.

The sequence then cuts to an acute angle of a hill that bisects the frame, concealing the horizon altogether. Rosaura collapses (we have been told in the opening scene that she has a heart condition). When the doctor Felipe Navarro (Fernando Fernández) discovers and revives her in the following scene, Figueroa's framing becomes increasingly abstract and expressionist. The land disappears and the cloud-filled sky is the only part of the environment visible. The action framed in dutch tilts and oblique composition, culminates with movements down and a pan that follows the sharp downward line of the diagonal horizon to dissolve through to a pan-tilt down to the tunnel-like entrance to Río Escondido.<sup>28</sup>

The visual structure of abstract composition and perspective set against a wide sky disturbs the audience's conventional relationship to space. In so doing, Figueroa creates an ambiguity between the virtual and the real space of the film, which, in turn, generates a tension between the official rhetoric of national progress through education and health care inherent in Rosaura's and Felipe's dialogue and the stark visual portrait of the rural space and its people. Through Figueroa's lens the governmental policy of regeneration and progress of rural Mexico appears not just superficial, but futile.

The image of the stark, brutal landscape and community as beyond the understanding and, therefore, control of central government was not accidental. Figueroa developed new ways of working with filters and film stock for *Río Escondido*. He had investigated da Vinci's theories on the colour and texture of the atmosphere and the atmospheric particles that created a 'haze' between the painter and his subject (de Orellana, 1988: 39).<sup>29</sup> Figueroa discovered that with an infra-red filter he was able to eliminate the smog he saw between the camera and the subject to give a clearer image.<sup>30</sup> He then combined slightly lighter reds with green filters to attain the required intensity of contrast in ratio to the mid-greys in the image. The make-up and clothing of the actors was consequently adjusted to keep within the tonal range, as reds, for example, would register as whites (Figueroa Flores, 2002, Dey, 1995: 42). He then combined this use of filters with a technique that underexposed the film and adjusted it by pushing (over-exposing) the stock when it was developed in the

laboratory (Figueroa Flores: 2002). The result created the impression of a three-dimensional image through depth of field and tonal texture. It created what Figueroa described as the 'Mexican landscape in balanced forms, chiaroscuros, half-toned skies and the kind of immense clouds that we all fear' (Dey, 1995: 42).

In *Río Escondido*, the modern forces of progress cannot penetrate the land or fight against ignorance and oppression encountered in the rural space. *La patria*/Rosaura struggles across the arid wastes and ultimately dies in the desolate village. The film's overt message, that government initiatives in education and health are progressive forces through which to unite the nation, is rendered insignificant in the barren streets of Río Escondido and the brutally stark landscape that lies beneath Figueroa's fearful, rainless clouds.

### **The Domain of the Criollo**

In his insightful analysis of racial ideology in Mexico, Lomnitz Adler (1992) reveals the complexities of this class-race dynamic that became manifest in a complicated caste system that was not based purely on colour, but on political and economic strategies as well. He argues that the Spaniards' retention and use of certain hierarchical aspects of Indian society worked to benefit the dominant Spanish hegemony, which is why later the use of Indian culture was to be central to the formation of Mexican nationalism. (Lomnitz Adler 1992: 262-265). Although, in theory, *castas* were abandoned at Independence and replaced by the concept of *mestizaje*, whiteness was still seen as something that guaranteed status. The term Indian simultaneously became associated with backwardness, dirt, poverty and disease rather than a racial category, hence dark skinned, poorer Mestizos were also categorised as Indian. Indeed, the concept that whiteness was somehow more 'civilized' was so embedded in society that Justo Sierra declared that Europeans were needed 'so as to obtain a cross with the Indigenous race, for only European blood can keep the level of civilization from sinking, which would mean regression not evolution' (Knight, 1990: 78). Consequently, the change from caste to class still kept the Indian at the bottom of the social hierarchy and the European at the top. Even after the revolution, despite the reappraisal of the Indian and the revalorisation of the

Indian past through *indigenismo*, the growing aspirations of the state to bring itself in line with the United States and Europe paradoxically led to the notion to 'mejorar la raza'. This was an impulse to self-improvement only seen as possible if one would 'blanquearse', literally whiten oneself (Lomnitz Adler, 1992: 278).<sup>31</sup>

Figueroa's representation of rural space and the characters in *Río Escondido* serves as an effective demonstration of the dynamic between class and race that Lomnitz discusses. In the film Rosaura, the representative of *la patria* and the Mexican state's rural policies is, significantly, a Creole. Although presented as poor Mestiza, it is María Félix, a white Creole actress, who plays the character. Figueroa's control of the film stock exaggerates her whiteness against the darker skin tones of the villagers with whom she works. In scenes with the village community, he frames Rosaura in either an oppositional relationship to the Indian residents or as central and dominant in frame. In shots with village women, he positions Rosaura on one side of shot and the women on the other. Ramírez Berg argues that in so doing, Figueroa breaks the diagonal lines in the frame, representative of class and ethnic divisions to unite Rosaura with the oppressed (1994: 22). However, in the majority of shots Rosaura is framed on an oppositional diagonal, usually top-left frame, above the other figure in bottom right of shot. Her gaze directs the viewer's eye in a downward diagonal to the other figure. The illuminated whiteness and smooth texture of her skin contrasts dramatically with the darkness and rough complexions of the women, dressed in their black *rebozos*. Although presented as sympathetic to and compassionate with the poor, the ethnic hierarchy remains intact with the Creole *patria*, physically placed above the Indians. Despite the framing and action that unite the characters, the relationship between Rosaura and the anonymous village women and children is patriarchal rather than equal. *La patria* patronises the community and reinforces, rather than disrupts, the strict social hierarchy.

The figure of Regino Sandoval, the Creole *cacique* (Carlos López Moctezuma) further strengthens the maintenance of the racial and social status quo. On the rare occasions that Figueroa frames Regino in shot with the villagers, he is in a



dominant position, mounted on a horse or shot from a low-angle. Although he shares few sequences with the villagers, he has many scenes with Rosaura. In their first, violent encounter Regino dominates Rosaura in frame. Rosaura is isolated and shot from high-angles, Regino from low-angles against the empty village and with his henchmen in the background. This visual relationship develops and changes through the film until the climax of the film where Rosaura and Regino's positions reverse. When Rosaura finally shoots Regino she stands over him, dominant in frame.

The visual relationship Figueroa establishes between Rosaura and Regino is, therefore, quite distinct from their visual representation in relation to the village community. What results is a spatial and narrative struggle for power between two Creoles. On the one hand, is Rosaura/*la patria*, progressive, compassionate and socially aware; on the other, is Regino, reactionary, cruel and oppressive. Both characters are united by Figueroa's visual presentation whereas the silent inhabitants of Río Escondido remain equally patronised whether by regressive or progressive forces. Spatially and visually, power clearly remains the domain of the Creole.

The demise of Rosaura, the symbol of the modern Mexican state, in a rural environment populated by visible but mute Indians (played by non-professional Indian extras) and dominated by a cruel, Creole *cacique* and his Mestizo henchmen, proposes issues concerning race, class and power in relation to the rural space that are present in other films Figueroa shot. Race, class and power are central themes in *María Candelaria* (1943), *La perla* (1945), *Pueblerina* (1948) and *La rebelión de los colgados* (1954) all directed by Emilio Fernández, and in *El rebozo de Soledad* (1952) and *Macario* (1959), directed by Roberto Gavaldón. But it is in *Ánimas Trujano*, directed by Ismael Rodríguez in 1961, that landscape, space and social place sharply define the main character of the film, Ánimas Trujano, the Oaxacan Indian who wants to become 'un hombre importante'.

### **Positions of Power in *Ánimas Trujano* (*Un hombre importante*)**

Whereas in *Río Escondido* the Indians are a silent backdrop to a power struggle between Creoles, in *Ánimas Trujano* (Ismael Rodríguez, 1961) they are the central characters. Figueroa's representation of the Indians in the film reveals a notion of 'good' and 'bad' Indians that demonstrates the hegemonic practices of the Creole/Mestizo majority that contain and thereby control the Indian minority.

The study that follows of *Ánimas Trujano* examines the power positions of the characters within the rural space, specifically Oaxaca, through an analysis of the visual dialectics Figueroa constructs in the film. To understand the basis on which such a system of dialectic is built, I shall first give a brief overview of how ethnicity and race form the basis of a Mexican national identity that promotes racial unity under the banner of *Mestizaje* whilst simultaneously maintaining a race/class elite.

### **The Indian, *lo mexicano* and Identity**

In an enlightened study, Enrique Florescano points to the distinct historical discourses of the pre-Hispanic age and the viceroyalty that defined the basis for subsequent constructions of national identity. Florescano argues that the absolute control the pre-colonial rulers had over the interpretation and dissemination of history fragmented with Spanish colonization. In its enforced creation of larger political units, the governing elite of New Spain divided the established territory of diverse tribal groups. Consequently, the cohesion of the distinct aboriginal communities that constituted the Mexica empire fractured. The viceroyalty 'came to be a disintegrated mosaic of contrasting peoples, ethnic groups, languages and cultures, disseminated in an extensive territory with poor communication'. As a result of this 'primordial disintegration' there was a distinct shift in processes of memory and time. The consequence was a construction of hybrid historical discourses and identities that came about from multiple social realities (Florescano, 1994: 184-185).<sup>32</sup> As the aboriginal Indian by definition was connected to land and consequently with notions of its ownership, the pre-colonial past and its people became fundamental to

constructions of a cohesive national identity that were central to maintaining the power of the governing elite.

As discussed above, Both Lomnitz Adler and Knight address the complex results of the multiple social, cultural and racial realities that Florescano defines. Both argue that the inherent racism of the colonial caste system persisted through the independence period, the revolution and into the present. Consequently, *indigenismo*, the lionisation of pre-hispanic and Indian culture that was an attempt, on the part of successive nationalist discourses, to construct a unified national identity based on the indigenous past, was imbued with racism, which often appeared in the form of reverse racism and an unhelpful idealisation of all things Indian (Knight, 1990: 87-92).<sup>33</sup>

Both Lomnitz Adler and Knight highlight the fundamental paradoxes that arise between post-revolutionary *indigenismo* in relation to *mestizaje* due to the persistent presence of race and class hierarchies in Mexico. Ultimately, the deployment of *indigenismo* subsumes multiple ethnicities and cultures into a homogeneous mass that seeks to integrate the Indian into Mestizo society and in so doing, 'liberate the country from the deadweight of its native past' (Brading, 1988: 85). As Knight lucidly concludes, Indians, 'are discriminated against for being Indian and at the same time admired for being the "real soul" of Mexico, living proof of Mexico's noble, pre-hispanic heritage'. (Knight, 1990: 101).

*Ánimas Trujano* is a clear demonstration of the contradiction in nationalist discourse which, on the one hand lionises Indian heritage and situates it as central to Mexican identity and on the other hand locates it as 'other'. Indeed, the film exemplifies the conundrum, so cogently acknowledged by Lomnitz Adler and Knight, in its characterisation of 'good' Indians who are compliant to and contained by the Mestizo state and 'bad' Indians who persist in their traditional practices and beliefs and, therefore, have the potential to undermine the hegemony of *Mestizaje*.

As mentioned earlier, rural space is fundamental to nationalist discourse and inherent in the notion of *indigenismo*. The action of *Ánimas Trujano* is emphatically located in the state of Oaxaca, a physical space that represents the national 'other'.

### **Oaxaca as 'Other'**

In the opening, pre-credit sequence of the film, a globe turns in space to stop with the American continent facing the viewer, followed by a zoom into Mexico's Oaxaca region. Consistent with the film's intention to reach an international audience, the state of Oaxaca is located for the viewer who may not be aware of its location, whilst the shot simultaneously situates Oaxaca in a global context.

To a Mexican viewer, the state of Oaxaca evokes a distinct and contradictory image of a large Indian population, rich in aboriginal cultures but rife with poverty. It is a place of economic underdevelopment and hunger that is the site of a beautiful and overwhelming landscape of *sierra* and forest, yet inhospitable and difficult to exploit. Oaxaca is seen as the motherland of pre-Hispanic culture (the archaeological sites of Monte Albán and Mitla predate Tenochtitlán) but nevertheless, is perceived as a cultural backwater, reactionary and opposed to progress. The region has several native languages/dialects, including Mixtec and Zapotec, but they are minority languages in a country where Spanish is the dominant idiom of politics and culture. Shamanism and magic rooted in ancient religions and traditional healing are inherently linked to spiritual practices, yet the state is also seen as a centre of *brujería*, superstitious belief and dangerous medical procedures. In short, the Oaxaca of *Ánimas Trujano* represents the indigenous heritage of Mexico, which, as Knight so cogently expresses, is embraced as fundamental to the country's self-identity and simultaneously rejected as regressive and threatening. Consequently, Oaxaca, where the cultural, social and political contradictions that form modern Mexico are unequivocally visible, is a complex cinematic space for a Mexican film.

### 'Good' and 'Bad' Indians

Ánimas Trujano (Toshiro Mifune) is a lazy, violent drunkard who exploits his wife and family, challenges authority, is imprisoned and released only to squander his wife Juana's (Columba Domínguez) hard-earned savings on gambling and a prostitute. He sells his grandson and spends the money on fulfilling his ambition to become *mayordomo* of the village.<sup>34</sup> However, the community realise how he has suddenly come into the money and reject him. The long suffering Juana kills Catalina (Flor Silvestre) the prostitute. Filled with remorse at his past actions, Ánimas assumes responsibility for the murder and surrenders himself.

Although not based on an actual story or events, the use of documentary form at the beginning of the film lends the subsequent fictional narrative a historical and anthropological authority and opens up the reading of the film on two levels, as a fictional narrative and as a social documentary. The opening voice-over suggests to the viewer that, although Ánimas is a fictional character, his 'type' exists and thereby sets up an explicit distinction between 'good' Indians and 'bad' Indians that is at play throughout the film. The narrator stakes a claim on the villagers as being 'nuestros indios'. The commentary locates Indian culture as 'living artifacts in a museum' whom an undefined 'we', (presumably the nation), must care for and maintain. The narration makes the viewer complicit with a notion of benign patronage for 'nuestros indios', the 'good' Indians, whom 'we' own and Indians such as Ánimas, whom we must repress and contain.

Throughout the film, Juana and Tadeo (Antonio Aguilar) represent the good Indians; they are industrious, respectful and submissive to authority and the status quo. Ánimas is, potentially, a subversive character, who questions the authority of the ruling elite, the structure of his own community and their subservience. However, typed as a bad Indian, constantly weakened by his drunkenness and internal bitterness, any radical element that his character could inject into the film is denied. At no point in the narrative is his anger redirected to effect personal and social change. The priest, in naming Ánimas *mayordomo*, believes he can instill some sense of duty and responsibility in his

character and make him a good Indian – Catholic, God-fearing, humble and diligent; in a word, containable.

Having established Ánimas as a type, Rodríguez develops the narrative through and with his character. Through Ánimas we encounter many of the situations that are central causes to his anti-social and violent behaviour. However, unlike his contemporary, Glauber Rocha, in Brazil, Rodríguez does not distance his characters enough to demonstrate to the audience the cause and effect of social and political climates upon them. In contrast to Manuel in *Deus o Diabo na terra do sol* (Rocha, 1964), Ánimas's transformation is not a political act.<sup>35</sup> At no point does Rodríguez make the link between Ánimas's actions and character and the environment that has made him how he is. His macho behaviour is a compensation for the deep insecurity he feels. His need for constant attention and praise stems from the powerlessness that is the reality of his life. The narrative, however, never examines the roots of Ánimas's disempowered existence. Therefore, the rebellious acts that he commits have no political direction and, finally, become self-destructive.

### **The Visual Dialectic of Good and Bad Indians**

Figueroa's formation of a visual dialectic is founded on the oppositions of 'good' and 'bad' Indians. Figueroa's cinematography in *Ánimas Trujano* uses the spatial relationships between characters and place within shots to set up a visual language that underscores the inherent ideology of the film. He positions characters systematically within the following visual and structural oppositions:

High-angle	Low-angle
Light	Dark
White	Black
Luminosity	Shadow
Foreground	Background
Top of frame	Bottom of frame

What is significant in the film is that Figueroa uses elements of this dialectic in two ways. First, to express the characters' social relationships with each other

and second, to establish characters' social and racial positions to the rural space they occupy.

Central to the creation of the visual dialectic in the film is Figueroa's decision to shoot *Ánimas Trujano* on Cinemascope. Cinemascope creates an image that includes twice the horizontal field whilst the vertical field remains unaltered. When projected, the image is twice the usual width on the cinema screen with an aspect ratio of 1:2.66. This affected the composition of shots. The strong, diagonal compositions that Figueroa had used to great effect in other films were difficult to achieve on this ratio, especially as it required the use of lenses with a short focal range. The aesthetic advantage of cinemascope was that it gave the possibility of bi-lateral symmetry, that is a composition that took advantage of the width to set each side of the frame in a visual relationship with the other. In other words, instead of a composition in depth, it had a greater range of choices for a composition in width. Figueroa used Cinemascope to set up a system of visual dialectics in *Ánimas Trujano* that worked on the distance between the characters and the space they inhabit in frame. He also had greater freedom to light each side of the frame to express the different characteristics of the emotional subtext of scenes.

Figueroa immediately establishes the visual dialectic in the film during the opening scene of the baby's death. *Ánimas* is framed at eye level, mainly in mid-shot and medium close-up. Figueroa's composition and lighting isolate *Ánimas* from the domestic space. A tilt-pan connects the other children to the baby as it lies dying, yet the move right to left to *Ánimas* conveys the emotional distance between the children and their father and situates him outside of the domestic arena. Juana enters from long shot to join *Ánimas* in frame and establishes her role as family mediator and her predominant, physical position in relation to *Ánimas*. Whilst he sits slumped on the floor, drinking in the shadows, Juana stands over him, her paler face lit with a soft key that gives her a luminance in contrast to the dark, hard lines on *Ánimas*'s face. *Ánimas* denies her pleas to fetch the doctor and he physically restrains her. However, his position provokes a feeling of impotence in his macho gesture and behaviour. He commands Juana, yet she is dominant in frame.

Her position establishes an ambiguity within their relationship that is evident throughout the film.

The *velación* scene which follows, foreshadows the imminent fall of Ánimas. Physically wrestled to the ground by Tadeo, the camera looks down onto Ánimas as he swears revenge. Ánimas snatches a machete and demands that Tadeo fight. But his threat is rejected and he stands dark against shadowy surroundings, isolated and rejected, while Tadeo is lit full face, linking him to Juana as a good Indian by the luminous quality of his face. The community is shown en masse in the following shot, clearly lit and looking out of frame towards Ánimas in the shadows. As a result, Figueroa establishes the key visual relationships in the first five minutes that he develops throughout the film.

Although Ánimas inhabits the same fictional landscape as the other characters, as the film progresses, Figueroa creates a separate visual space for him through the use of hard-key lighting, usually placed at a 60-degree angle to the side of Ánimas. The lighting creates shadows that emphasise the lines and texture of Ánimas's face. Figueroa builds on this lighting motif and it culminates in the *gallo de oro* scene. Moreover, Ánimas is often framed alone, outside and isolated from those around him. Figueroa constantly frames him in the bottom-half of frame, usually on the ground, either lying or squatting. In contrast, Juana is seen lying down only once, in the scene in which Ánimas, rejected by the prostitute Catalina, brutally takes out his frustration on his wife.

In the scene in which Juana suggests that the family go to work for the local *mezcal* producer, she finds Ánimas lying on his back under a tree. She kneels over him as she talks. He becomes irritated, rises and walks up the slope. He aggressively confronts Pedro (Pepe Romay), his son, growling '¿Qué me ves? Ya, sé qué estas pensando...' [sic] and hits him. As he turns to say that they will all go to work, Figueroa shoots him from a low-angle and frames him in opposition to the family. Positioned under a dead tree, the dark tones of Ánimas's skin match the darkness of the branches that are juxtaposed against the empty white sky. By contrast, Figueroa creates a balanced composition for



the family with a leafy tree in the background. The position and lighting on Ánimas implies his isolation, distanced from his family, within a barren, personal space. Figueroa highlights the paler skin tones of Juana and the children and adds depth to the composition through a grey/black/white scale, which connects them through the depth of the frame to the space they inhabit. Ánimas's physical elevation from low-angle is, however, short-lived and he suddenly slumps down to the ground. The barren tree looms ominously behind him. Figueroa thus conveys Ánimas's character and relationship to his family through an extension of the film's visual dialectic:

Ánimas	Juana/Family
High-key lighting	Soft-fill lighting
Shadow and darkness	Sunlight
Dark skin tones	Paler skin tones
High-angles down	Low-angles up
Horizontal position	Vertical position

Figueroa's subsequent treatment of the scenes with the Creole *hacendado* extend the play on visual contrasts in construction of the image and expose the complex hierarchy of the Creole/Mestizo/Indian cultures and their position within space and landscape (DVD clip 4). The scenes are the most complex in terms of Rodríguez's direction and Figueroa's cinematography. It is during these sequences that Ánimas is pictured at his lowest. Juana is positioned above him, on a level with the *hacendado* (Eduardo Fajardo) and a cooperative relationship is established between the Indian woman and her Creole boss, who is, significantly, a *mezcal* producer, the very drink that is Ánimas's weakness.

Figueroa consistently frames the *hacendado* in positions of dominance. Our introduction to him is on a horse, a visual reference to the first *conquistadores*. He is dressed in white, with a white hat, smoking a cigar. Figueroa frames him just off-centre, the workers gaze up at him. The whiteness of his clothes and skin, in conjunction with a short depth of field, distance him from the background landscape. With his choice of lens, Figueroa at once separates the

*hacendado* from the land and the Indians that work for him, yet maintains his dominance of the space and the frame.

At the weighing house, Figueroa frames the *hacendado* and Juana in a low angle up to the platform on which they both stand. Ánimas enters below and says to the Creole, 'Arriba ó abajo es del mismo tamaño'. But the comment goes nowhere. Juana and the Creole stand together on the platform looking down on him. The reverse shot of Ánimas is high-angle down and he shares the frame with a donkey. Throughout the scenes in which Ánimas and the *hacendado* feature, the camera is placed predominantly in low-angle, shooting up to the Creole and high-angle down towards Ánimas. Figueroa further emphasises the inequality of their relationship with lighting that has a consistently diffuse, luminous quality on the white skin and clothing of the Creole, whilst Ánimas is lit by a high key that throws hard shadows onto his face.

Juana's positioning with the *hacendado* and her share of the frame is notable. It unites the two in their view of Ánimas. Juana, with her submissive and diligent attitude impresses the *mezcalero*. She is a good Indian, yet despite the acknowledgement he affords her, it does not stop him calling her 'una india ladina' when she begs him to sign a petition to release Ánimas. The visual, triangular relationship of Ánimas/Juana/*hacendado*, that is bad Indian/good Indian/Creole, and their position within the filmic and metaphorical space created by Figueroa, culminates in the scene in which the *hacendado* comes to claim the baby fathered by his son, Belarmino (Juan Carlos Pulido) in a brief affair with Ánimas's daughter, Dorotea (Titina Romay) (DVD clip 5). It is significant that the shared grandson of Ánimas, Juana and the *hacendado* is the embodiment of *Mestizaje*. Further, when Juana and Ánimas surrender custody of the baby to the Creole, it is on the understanding that he will have a 'decent' upbringing which, it is inherently implied, his Indian grandparents cannot give.

Significantly in a previous scene in which Ánimas, unexpectedly released early from jail, finds the money in the hut, beats Juana, Figueroa employs expressionistic techniques to shoot the scene. He uses a top shot, through the

roof to show the fall of Juana. The preceding scenes, which demonstrate Juana's strength and resourcefulness in Ánimas's absence, are brutally transformed into the darkness of his return. The expressionistic lighting of the hut transforms the sunny day into darkness and foreshadows Ánimas's violent assertion of power. However, in distancing the viewer so high above the scene, Figueroa also makes Ánimas a victim. The shot exposes the disempowered Juana and Ánimas, both visually trapped by the acute angle and framing.

By contrast, the subsequent baby-selling scene places Juana once more in a dominant position. She stands, while Ánimas sits. The *hacendado* arrives and walks straight into the hut, neither asking permission, nor signalling his arrival. Ánimas grabs his machete. The Creole reassures Ánimas that he has money for him. Figueroa structures the sequence around a long shot, with the Creole and Juana on the left-hand side of frame and Ánimas on the right, a two-shot medium close-up of the *hacendado* and Juana and a medium close-up of Ánimas, opposite to Juana and the *hacendado* with Pedro in focus in the background, looking on.

A baby's cry from outside draws attention to the wet nurse in the carriage. Figueroa's use of depth of field and a tonal range that changes from the darker, more textural interior of the hut to the bright, flat, exterior establishes two planes of action and two parallel realities. On the one hand, the interior Indian space of the hut and on the other, the exterior Creole/Mestizo space. The *hacendado* crosses frame to Ánimas, breaking away from Juana and enters into a medium close-up with Ánimas. The Creole dominates the frame and, with a low-angle, Figueroa accentuates his height above Ánimas and his pervasive presence within the Indian space. He demands that the couple give up the baby. The visual and narrative relationship established between the *hacendado* and Juana is broken and she appears isolated with the baby in the corner of the hut. For the first and only time in the film, Ánimas and the *hacendado* are united in the frame and in their attitude as they both attempt to coerce Juana into surrendering the baby. Finally, Ánimas crosses the frame in long shot and demands that Juana obey him. Juana, however, is finally convinced by the

*hacendado's* comments that the baby will grow up in poverty, uneducated like her other children, with Ánimas as a role model if it stays. With her surrender, she accepts that all he says is true. In so doing, Juana acknowledges the racist structure of a society, in which illiteracy and poverty can only be overcome by submission to or collaboration with the Creole rural hegemony. Her grandson will have to *blanquearse* in order to progress.

The *hacendado* and the family move outside. Figueroa frames the carriage and the horses so that they dominate the landscape. The size of the Mestiza nurse takes up most of the low-angle frame. Her political, cultural position as half-Indian, half-Spanish, is literally acted out as Ánimas and the Creole both push her up into the carriage. The two cultures heave under the ever-growing weight of *mestizaje*. Her milk, abundant enough to feed two, is given to the baby and she disdainfully rejects Juana's offer of the bottle of goat's milk. Her 'Hmmmph!' expresses her contempt, accentuating the message that Mestizo, progressive Mexico is the superior society of abundant milk and money. Juana refuses the Creole's departing offer of cash, but Ánimas greedily snatches the notes as the *hacendado* and wet-nurse wave down to the family in a foreshortened high-angle. As the carriage leaves in long shot, Figueroa tracks the camera back into the hut to frame the Creole's departure through the window, with the empty cot swinging in the foreground.

Figueroa's visual presentation of the film's two main characters may be read as an attempt to accentuate the strengths of Juana and the weakness of Ánimas. Their visual presentation would suggest this. Yet, ultimately, Juana accepts and demonstrates a subservient role. Rodríguez explains this in the narrative as Ánimas's salvation being through Juana's love for him. If one interprets Rodríguez's intention in the narrative to show Juana's love for Ánimas and its ability to transform him as being the most powerful force in the film, Juana is granted the place of heroine in the film. However, one is left at the end of the film with a sense of unease. Although Ánimas achieves a form of transcendence, by the end of the narrative, Juana remains unchanged. Juana is, in the final analysis, stoic, supportive and suffering. She is the catalyst of

personal transformation for the male, yet the possibility that she could transcend her role is not contemplated.

Paradoxically, Figueroa's framing and lighting of Juana, particularly in relationship with the Creole *hacendado*, denies her any possibility to transcend the dominant racial, economic and social hierarchies. The potential for transcendence of her role is signified by her position in frame and within the luminance of the Creole spaces. Yet, this ultimately reflects a contradiction in her role between passive support of the dominant social hegemony, represented by the *hacendado* and the dynamic provider for her family.

*Ánimas Trujano* could have been a socially critical film. It could have exposed how the Spanish colonialism that engulfed Mexico transformed into a social hierarchy based on race that continued to structure Mexican society despite independence and the revolution. However, the narrative and Figueroa's visual style create ambiguity, rather than critique. Juana, Tadeo and the villagers inhabit a space of luminous light and harmonious framing, in the style of the most incandescent and dominant in frame, the Creole. The visual and spatial links between the good Indian and the Creole and the birth of Dorotea and Belarmino's baby suggest that the union of the two races, Creole and Indian, to create *Mestizaje* is both positive and progressive.

By contrast, the space Figueroa creates around *Ánimas* is dark, shadow-filled, moonlit, a space of superstition and deceit. It is the 'other' Oaxaca. It is a potentially subversive space that must be undermined and kept low in frame, a landscape to be examined from a high-angle but not entered. Yet, ultimately, despite the apparent visual and narrative union of the good Indian with the Creole, the Creole remains subtly dominant in frame, more luminous, more powerful. The final shot of him high up the carriage handing the money down to *Ánimas* and the track back into the dark, empty hut undermines any suggestion of change. As in *Río Escondido*, the Creole remains firmly at the centre of the social and political frame.

Consequently, Ánimas's final words as he runs across the ruins of Monte Albán, 'Usted no sabe como es la carcel', become metaphorical. As he sobs his fear to his *compadre* he is talking of his own personal prison, built from his own cowardice and insecurities. But his words could also be interpreted as the words of the Others that Ánimas represents, those bad Indians, imprisoned in their social position, locked into their poverty, isolated in a space that is made other, by the hegemonic control of the Creole/Mestizo culture.

### **Compromised Dialectics and Absent Analysis**

Close attention to the cinematography in *Ánimas Trujano* and *Río Escondido* reveals tensions between the construction of the rural space and the ideology within the films' narratives. In *Río Escondido*, the didactic rhetoric of the new progressive Mexico is undermined by the stark, expressionistic creation of an unchangeable, overwhelming rural environment. In *Ánimas Trujano*, the potentially progressive visual dialectic that expresses the complex social relationships between Creole, Indian and Mestizo is made redundant by reactionary stereotyping of good and bad Indians, in good and bad situations, under the patriarchal control of the white Creole. As a result, the narrative compromises the social critique that might be read into Figueroa's visual rendition of race and class.

It is important to remember that Figueroa's stated aim in every film he worked on was to communicate the director's and writer's vision to his best ability. Further, although he never discussed his cinematography in terms of politics, I would agree with Carlos Monsivaís that Figueroa elaborated on what the spaces and characters suggested to him (Monsivaís, 1988: 66). Hence, despite his lack of overt acknowledgement of the politics inherent in his work, on close analysis, Figueroa's cinematography is clear evidence of the inconsistencies present in the films' contemporary social, political and economic contexts.

Moreover, this chapter draws attention to the significant absence of detailed analysis of rural space in film studies. When Errol Flynn declares in *Silver River* (Raoul Walsh, 1948), 'I don't intend to blend with the landscape, I intend to fill it!', his character aptly sums up the role of landscape in the western

which is to provide an empty space for the hero to fill with US notions of the frontier and individualism. Yet, despite such acknowledgement of the rural space and its importance to US national identity, in the large body of work on the western and road movie, there is no study of its cinematographic construction. The work of scholars such as Pidduck and Phillips suggests fresh paradigms with which to appraise the currently neglected work of the cinematographer. Yet, in Mexican film scholarship, as in US western film analysis, to date there has been no previous detailed analysis of landscape, despite its central role in the national imagination of Mexico.

*Río Escondido* and *Ánimas Trujano* are just two examples of how, through close analysis of Figueroa's cinematography, the inherent class, race and power structures present in late 1940s and early 1960s Mexico are revealed. The analysis of these films points to areas for future study of space over a wider range of films by Figueroa and other filmmakers. What has emerged in this overview is that Figueroa's cinematographic construction of the rural space exposed contradictions in the social and political ideologies contemporary to the films. The fissures that the countless frames reveal, paradoxically provided space for the deep roots of Figueroa's carnivorous flower to bloom in the collective memory of Mexico.

---

<sup>1</sup> From an interview in Poniatowska (1996: 55).

<sup>2</sup> See Vaughan (1999) for references and analysis.

<sup>3</sup> In his acceptance speech for the Premio Nacional de Artes in 1971, Figueroa declared: 'Al transfigurar la realidad con un implemento mecánico, la realidad me transfiguraba a mí mismo y me hacía crecer como un hombre entre otros hombres'.

<sup>4</sup> The main destinations for migrants were Mexico City, Oaxaca City, Veracruz and Puebla. Anthropologist Colin Clarke estimates that, for example, between 1930 and 1940, migration from Oaxaca Central valleys was 21% for men aged 20-29 and 18% for women aged 30-34 and that after 1950 migration increased substantially from this already high figure and included

---

migration to the United States. See Clarke (2000) for an analysis of migration from rural southern Mexico to the urban centres.

<sup>5</sup> See also Hershfield (1999: 82) who gives a detailed account of the post-revolutionary attempts to produce a homogenous national identity in terms of race and ethnicity.

<sup>6</sup> Lomnitz has written an incisive critique of the so-called hermetic Indian that was central to Octavio Paz's influential essay on national identity, *El laberinto de soledad* and that relates directly to Figueroa's silent Indians. Lomnitz rejects the stereotype of the Indian as that of solitude, closure and formality, and suggests that it is only through contact with Mestizos and Creoles that this impression emerges, as contact with the dominant classes and races 'mute' other classes and groups. See Lomnitz Adler (1992: Chapter 18).

<sup>7</sup> Alan Knight's work on the Revolution foregrounds the ambivalence of the post-revolutionary regimes and the constant negotiation between conservative and liberal policies with regard to the land, modernisation and development. See Knight (1994) for an account of how popular culture engaged with the ambiguity of state policies and ideology.

<sup>8</sup> In an interview with Malú Huacaja del Toro, Figueroa discussed his manipulation of gamma: 'En todos los laboratorios en 6.5 era la gama del blanco y negro. Y yo en cierta ocasión, por favorecer los colores negros bajé la gama a 5.5 cosa que ningún fotógrafo había hecho nunca. A los blancos les tenía yo que poner luz para que no salieran chocolates. Esto lo hice en la película *Río Escondido*' (Huacaja del Toro, 1997: 75).

<sup>9</sup> Dissent and the major social and political insurgencies have always emerged from non-urban space. The Tzeltol Republic (1712), the Chiapas Rebellion (1869), the Yaqui rebellions and, not least, the Revolution of 1911-1920 all rose up in the provinces and, more recently the EZLN uprisings (1994) in Chiapas and Oaxaca (2006). For a detailed analysis and accounts of rural rebellion and its effects on attitudes and subsequent policies towards rural Mexico see Gilly (1997), Brading (1980) and Benjamin and Wasserman (1990).

<sup>10</sup> See also Poniatowska (1996: 131) where she describes the Mexican landscape as a 'devorador'.

<sup>11</sup> Both the rural and urban space have been studied in relation to power and politics (Agnew & Duncan, 1989), identity (Carter, Donald & Squires, 1993), colonialism (Sluyter, 2002), iconography (Cosgrove & Daniels, 1988), memory (Schama, 1995), nationalism (Matless, 1998) environmentalism (Ingram, 2004; Bennett & Teague: 1999) and gender (Massey, 1994; Rose, 1993). Likewise, the methodologies and ways in which landscape, space and place are discussed are equally wide-ranging from socio-historical, economic and political perspectives to analysis through theories of post-colonialism, feminist theory and psychology.

<sup>12</sup> Examples include the seminal road movie *Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper, 1969) which journeys through the US south west to New Orleans and *Thelma and Louise* (Ridley Scott, 1991), the denouement of which takes place in the Canyonlands National Park. Significantly, the ending to the film has been assumed by some critics to end in Monument Valley, the location for



---

seven John Ford westerns among them *Stagecoach* (1938) and *The Searchers* (1956) whose narrative, paradoxically, is based in Texas.

<sup>13</sup> For a perceptive reading of landscape in the road movie and its relationship to the construction of US national identity see Barbara Klinger (1997), for landscape in the western see Clive Bush (1996), Michael Budd (1976), Ed Buscombe (1995). Jenni Calder (1974) writes in detail about the relationship between the mythic hero and the land in the western.

<sup>14</sup> Massey observes that long-established texts by critics such as Kracauer (1995) made a strong case for the intimate relationship between the emergence of cinema and facets of urban development and that more recent essays have perpetuated this concept. Massey cites Bruno (1997) and Donald (1999).

<sup>15</sup> Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, for example, describes the deserted village in Antonioni's *L'Avventura* 'as a symbol, or a parable for the whole of modern life. Man, it seems to say, has built himself his own world, but he is incapable of living in it' (Nowell-Smith, 1976: 357). But the critic does not proceed to explore the creative and technical decisions that were made in shooting that landscape and that are central to his reading of the scene. He refers to the similarity of perspective in shots of the village to de Chirico's *pittura metafisica*, yet does not elucidate further on the effect and use of such exaggerated depth of field and framing. Paradoxically, the landscape is somehow taken as read, so fundamental to the image that it literally merges into the background. It is critically ignored as a visible but unexamined backdrop.

<sup>16</sup> I would argue that the literary and linguistic bias in founding film theory directed the reading of film towards the textual and semiotic, rather than the visual and aesthetic and I would reiterate this as a reason for the lack of engagement with landscape as a giver of meaning through the visual in film.

<sup>17</sup> Significantly, Pidduck's model for analysis harnesses the abstract 'movement-image' framework of Deleuze with socio-historical approaches grounded in literary criticism and geography, with references to the work of Said, Dyer, Williams and Rose (Pidduck, 1998: 385). Pidduck's use of such eclectic sources draws attention to the lack of visual engagement with landscape in film theory generally and the need to build a model for analysis, drawing from a variety of disciplines.

<sup>18</sup> For an overview of race and national identity in Mexico see Knight (1990) and in relation to film see Hershfield (1999: 81-100).

<sup>19</sup> Figueroa had won twice in Venice with *Allá en el Rancho Grande* (Fernando de Fuentes, 1938) and *La perla* (Emilio Fernández, 1948), at the Cannes festival with *María Candelaria* (Emilio Fernández, 1946) and at Brussels and Locarno for *Enamorada* (Emilio Fernández, 1947). His previous Ariels were for *Enamorada* (1946) and *La perla* (1947).

<sup>20</sup> These include Ramírez Berg (1992; 1994) and Ruy Sánchez (1992).

<sup>21</sup> It is interesting to note that in recent video copies of the film and televised versions the opening voice-over and the scene with Alemán have been edited out.

---

<sup>22</sup> For a detailed and enlightening account of this process see Fein (1999).

<sup>23</sup> Jenkins had been a principal stockholder in the original Banco Cinematográfico and was a key mover in the Nacional Financiera, the official credit agency on which film production depended. When the Banco Cinematográfico was reorganized into the Banco Nacional Cinematográfico, with the stated aim to limit private controls and monopolies in the industry through finance provided by the state, in conjunction with Banco de México and Banco Nacional de México, the other partner brought in was Nacional Financiera, in which Jenkins had substantial holdings (Mora, 1982: 76-78). Jenkins's subsequent partnership with entrepreneur Emilio Azcárraga, whose links, as discussed in Chapter Two, to the major US broadcasters and studios dated back to the late 1930s, reinforced transnational alliances between the ruling Mexican classes and their counterparts in the United States. These allegiances were compounded by transnational political and financial coalitions in other areas of the growing Mexican economy.

<sup>24</sup> Figueroa and Toland made extensive use of 24mm and 28mm lenses. The typical depth of field with Super XX negative would have been from 2ft to infinity with the 24mm at f16 and 4-50ft with the 28mm at f8. See Salt (1992: 233-234) for detailed technical specifications.

<sup>25</sup> For details on Figueroa's development of curvilinear perspective see Chapter Two.

<sup>26</sup> Indeed, the majority of human figures in traditional landscapes are portraits of landowners, who wanted to demonstrate their wealth, status and ownership of the landscape and its contents. See Berger (1972: 106-108)

<sup>27</sup> Ramírez Berg suggests that Figueroa's use of curvilinear perspective, and indeed Atl's, was a conscious search for an authentic Mexican aesthetic (1992 and 1994). However, Figueroa's reference to other influences suggests a transnational development of style, rather than a nationalist one.

<sup>28</sup> Figueroa dug holes in which to place the camera to obtain the extreme low-angles in the film (Figueroa Flores, G. (2000) interviewed by Ceri Higgins 30<sup>th</sup> September.)

<sup>29</sup> Figueroa specifically referred to da Vinci's manuscript *Colour and Light*.

<sup>30</sup> Distant landscapes and aerial views appear veiled by bluish atmospheric haze, even on clear days. When photographed without a filter, this veiling hides some of the detail visible in the scene. Atmospheric haze is distinct from mist or fog which are white and composed of water droplets. Haze scatters almost no infra-red, very little red light, some green light, more blue light and a large amount of ultra-violet. Since all photographic materials are highly sensitive to blue and ultra-violet, unfiltered pictures of distant landscapes record more haze than is visible. Through a yellow or red filter, which absorb the shorter visible wave lengths, the amount of recorded haze decreases.

<sup>31</sup> Lomnitz goes on to demonstrate how the system of *castas* was consciously refashioned to deny the ways in which it formed the basis of national ideology and reinforced racism and yet, paradoxically, co-opted the Indian hierarchical system as the basis for a protectionist state.

---

<sup>32</sup> For an analysis of the complicated construction of Creole identity and power up to Independence see Florescano (1994: 184-222).

<sup>33</sup> See Lomnitz Adler (1992 & 2001) and Knight (1990 & 1992).

<sup>34</sup> A new mayordomo is elected annually in Indian communities. The mayordomo is responsible for financing all the fiestas and rituals during the year and assumes the role of moral and financial authority in the community.

<sup>35</sup> For an analysis of this film and Manuel's character see Avellar (2002).

## Chapter Five

### Figueroa's City

El asfalto y la noche fueron espacios de miedos inexorables y tragedias lúgubres; imágenes que pusieron en crisis a esa naciente modernidad, al espacio urbano codificado en sus intensos contrastes primarios (visuales, dramáticos, morales).

(Coria, 1997: 52)

In its five-hundred year history, the city we know as Mexico developed from 'la región más transparente' (Reyes: 1917; Fuentes: 1958) to what Davis has called the 'urban leviathan' (1994). The twentieth century heralded a period of unprecedented change in the Mexican capital. The 1900s opened with the overthrow of Porfirio Díaz, a subsequent revolution, followed in the 1950s by unparalleled urban development that continued until the end of the millennium. The shift towards state-sponsored modernity that caused the capital's rapid growth is closely linked with the development of Mexican cinema and one of its prime figures, Figueroa. An examination of Figueroa's cinematography, therefore, reveals fundamental issues that arose from the uneasy relationship between Mexican nationalist ideology and the complex experience of modernity that came to a head in the fifteen years between the late 1940s and early 1960s. During this period, Figueroa created urban spaces that are sites of transition. The louche, subterranean nightclubs and the cramped *azotea* rooms (traditionally used to house servants and labourers) transform into the loci of socio-psychological drama as stairways and hallways become conduits between higher and lower social, political and moral levels.

In order to understand Figueroa's representation of Mexico City, I shall briefly consider how the city was constructed historically, not only in the architectural sense, but also how it was imaged and imagined. This will lead on to an

overview of how the city's image developed to establish the aesthetic and political scene in which Figueroa portrayed the urban space cinematographically. Further, and fundamental to a study of Figueroa's visual interpretation of the city, is an acknowledgment of how notions of modernity, particularly during the mid-twentieth century, when he was at the peak of his career, affected the images he produced.

The drive to modernity, so essential to successive political regimes in the post-war period, not only affected the physical appearance and experience of the city, but also provoked changes in the urban population.<sup>1</sup> Most significant was the way in which the role of women radically altered during the period of rapid expansion from the mid-1940s onwards. From the post-war period onwards film narratives were increasingly located in urban environments and the main characters in the melodramas and *cabareteras* (a inherently urban genre) that dominated Mexican screens, were women. Consequently, Figueroa's images of female characters in the city space expose issues around modernity that emerge together with disjunctions and contradictions that the Mexican urban space provoked. Through close analysis, therefore, of the seminal *cabaretera* film *Salon México* (Emilio Fernández, 1948) and the lesser known, but equally significant, melodrama, *Días de otoño* (Roberto Gavaldón, 1962) I shall discuss how the cinematography in both films positions women in relation to the modern city space and how fissures in the image of motherhood, a key trope of national identity, is subsequently revealed.

### **Constructing Mexico**

Mexico City is a multi-layered site. Historical events and physical construction are intimately interwoven into the very fabric of the city's spaces. Since the early fourteenth century, structures have been built on top of the remains of older edifices and subsequently remodelled into the hidden, but ever present, foundations of the new.<sup>2</sup> The Aztecs planned the city they named

Tenochtitlán as a three-dimensional representation of their quadripartite universe, with a ritual centre at its heart; a city where reality and myth interacted (Matos Moctezuma, 2002: 48-49). The role of Tenochtitlán as a microcosm of the universe and its place as central to empire was reinforced after the conquest when the Spanish conquistadors renamed it Mexico, a name that came to represent not only the city but also the country of which it was to be the capital. Consequently, from its inception, the development of Mexico City related intrinsically to a notion of nation. Mexico City was Mexico.<sup>3</sup>

In the same way that the city grew from layer upon layer of *tezonile*, stone and wood, the history of the capital and the nation was consistently deconstructed and rewritten. Just as the Aztecs appropriated and hid existing remains to build Tenochtitlán, and in the process construct their own history, the Spanish destroyed and recycled the Aztec centre to build the colonial capital and rewrite Mexico's story once more. Subsequently, as the metropolitan space grew and transformed during the colonial, baroque, Porfirian and post-revolution periods, the architecture and design of the city came to embody the politics and social outlook of the governing regime.<sup>4</sup>

The reconstruction of Tenochtitlán into Mexico City was a transnational, transchronological recycling operation. Materials from the pyramids and temples were re-used, together with imported rock and marble to construct a colonial capital. The result of this juncture of transnational labour and design was a synthesis of European styles that adapted and changed with the new materials, the topography of the Valley of Mexico and the spiritual beliefs and psychology of the indigenous labour.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, the creation of Mexico City was a mixture of aboriginal and imported building styles, materials and methods brought together by diverse spiritual and political beliefs. With the exception of a few plans and maps, there are few representations of the city from the early colonial period. I would suggest that the burgeoning city

expressed its own self image in a constant expansion and transformation of art, architecture, politics and economics. Throughout the colonial period and the significant shifts brought about by independence, war and revolution, the city/nation was in a constant state of changing definition. Elements of its former self provided the foundations of both edifices and written histories. As a result, the city transformed from a microcosm of the universe into the epitome of nation. Mexico the city became analogous to Mexico the nation.

Figueroa's images are as self-consciously constructed as the city itself. The metropolitan space on film does not correspond to the actuality of place but is built from the combined interpretation of Figueroa and the different directors and production designers with whom he worked. From the script to screen they remodelled the city, not only on location, but recreated it in the city's studios.<sup>6</sup>

Many of Figueroa's urban films start with wide establishing shots or general views of the city. The Zócalo features in several of his films including the two that I examine in this chapter.<sup>7</sup> These general views usually start with a high angle, followed by a slow pan right to left across the Zócalo, sweeping over the Palacio Nacional, with the volcanoes, Ixtaccihuatl and Popocatepetl, in the background of the frame. The pan ends to frame the cathedral on the left, the Palacio Nacional taking up the rest of shot. This wide establishing shot is then intercut with a variety of long shots of the Palacio, the Cathedral and the national flag. The shots resemble travelogue panoramas and could be placed at the beginning of any Mexico City-based narrative. However, what makes them significant is that they situate the Palacio Nacional and the Cathedral as dominant in the Mexican space. Consequently, the shots locate the narratives firmly in relation to the two aspects of social, moral and political power in Mexico that the physical buildings represent, the State and the Catholic Church.

The other locations used in the films do not necessarily correspond to the actual or authentic sites of the narratives, but those that best convey the meaning of the scenes to be shot. These were sought out and evaluated by Figueroa, together with the director and production designer. The final choices evolved from a combination of production and aesthetic decisions. Location shoots included interior as well as exterior scenes and usually a large amount of set construction and decoration was necessary to achieve the desired atmosphere and historical or social detail.

Alternatively, studio sets were constructed for both interior and exterior scenes. The choice to construct in the studio was made from a combination of economic, practical and artistic factors. Following on from his mentor Gregg Toland's example, Figueroa worked closely with the production designer in the planning and construction of the sets both on location and in the studio (Gerszo: 1991). Toland had shadows painted in on sets, perspectives altered by the size of props and room construction to achieve the visual quality required for the scene, as well as working around the practicalities that the lighting rig and camera movement required (Toland, 1941: 54-55). Figueroa took many of these ideas and incorporated them into his own work (Figueroa Flores: 2000).

What the production process of choosing, remodelling and shooting film locations and sets in studio reconstructions clearly demonstrates is that Figueroa's Mexico City, both inside and out, is a complex manipulation and literal construction of space. Most importantly, in addition to the choices and development of the metropolitan filmic space, it is vital to take into account that the underlying political commitment to modernity that informed the construction of this space provoked complex and often contradictory results in relation to post-revolutionary nationalist ideology.



## Mexico and Modernity

Throughout the twentieth century, Mexico City's unprecedented growth was a result of the country's political history. Its steady expansion during the early 1900s accelerated as the post-revolutionary political interest and economic investment in rural and agrarian reform gave way, in the 1940s, to large-scale, urban development. By 1960, the capital accounted for over 46% of national industrial growth. With the steady influx of immigrants from the rural areas to find work in the burgeoning industrial sector, the population boomed. Mexico City became the national centre for consumption and expansion. To accommodate the enormous growth in population and industry, the space the city occupied in the Valley of Mexico expanded from 9.1 square kilometres in the early 1900s to 1,500 square kilometres at the beginning of the twenty-first century (García Canclini, 2000: 208-209).

The breakneck speed of twentieth-century expansion in the Mexican urban space, in particular Mexico City, was closely bound to post-war concepts of progress and modernity. Notwithstanding the ideals of autonomy and self-determination that modernity and nationalism have in common, modernity's erosion of tradition and community was in direct conflict with nationalism's ideal of social cohesion (van Delden, 1998: 9). The result in Mexico was a conflict between the progressive, transnational imperative of modernity and nationalism's agenda of *indigenismo* and *mestizaje* that was persistently promoted to form the foundation of post-revolutionary identity. Or as Lomnitz Adler concludes, '[I]mages of national culture often emerge out of a sense of nostalgia for that which modernization destroys' and 'these nostalgic images can serve to justify a holistic, anti-democratic ideology that has been embodied in the post-revolutionary Mexican state' (Lomnitz Adler, 1992: 254).

The conflict between the political and economic drive to modernity and post-revolutionary ideology became increasingly evident during the Alemán regime.

The rift was manifested in the work of writers, artists and filmmakers as they were caught up in the on-going ambiguity between inward-looking, nostalgic nationalism and the cosmopolitanism inherent in the transnationalist, progressive agendas of subsequent post-war governments.<sup>8</sup> The endeavour to form a cohesive identity for national culture, supported by many cultural producers had, in many ways, served as an instrument to counter modernity and the emancipation that it potentially offered to a broader sector of the community by way of social and material benefits (van Delden, 1998: 9-10). By the same token, the internationalism inherent in modernity was viewed with caution as it held the potential to erode the national identity that had been methodically constructed around reclaimed indigenous culture.<sup>9</sup> The crux of the matter was that the social and economic benefits offered by modernity were offset by the threat of Euro-US economic infiltration and cultural influence that would compromise national sovereignty and identity. This essential ambivalence between modernity and nationalism was evident in the cultural work produced and, indeed, persisted well into the end of the twentieth century.<sup>10</sup>

The constant demolition and reconstruction of the city throughout its history provoked a search for historical identity during the colonial era, post-independence and the post-revolutionary period. From the 1940s, old buildings and, indeed, entire areas of Mexico city were demolished in the cause of rapid transnational, capitalist development, central to the ruling elite's interpretation of modernity. This led to an urgent struggle to articulate and retain a sense of national identity. Yet, an obvious fact was widely overlooked. The exploration and glorification of the past and the accompanying melancholic nostalgia has been blind to the fact that Mexico City has been in a constant process of transformation since its founding by the Mexica. As a result, Mexico City was, and continues to be, a site of intrinsic transition. Therefore, somewhat paradoxically, the drive to modernity experienced since the 1940s

was part of a long heritage of continual shifts in the political, social and economic development of Mexico, city and nation. Significantly, nowhere was the acknowledgement of the transitory nature of the city more apparent than in the films of the period. The images on the screen were of a Porfirian urban space, that had grafted itself onto a colonial city and was itself providing the foundations for the new Corbusier-style architecture of the modernist regime.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, by 1947 novelist and screenwriter José Revueltas had already concluded that cinema not only projected the ongoing experience of modernity, but, indeed, embodied it (Revueltas, 1947: 2-10). Mexican filmmakers who, since the beginning of cinema, had negotiated the contradiction between the development of a national cinema within a fundamentally transnational industry, increasingly used the city as the location in which to discuss the reservations and, indeed, the underlying insecurity that the increased momentum of modernity provoked.<sup>12</sup>

### **Film and the City**

The overwhelming presence of the city in Figueroa's work reflects the intimate relationship between cinema and the urban space that has been present in films since the beginning of cinema. The ubiquitous city has defined genres such as film noir and has taken a leading role in the narratives of chronologically, politically, geographically and aesthetically diverse films. Examples include *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (Walter Rutman, 1927), *Roma città aperta* (Rossellini, 1945), *Tokyo Monogatori* (Yasijuro Ozu, 1953), *New York, New York* (Martin Scorsese, 1977) and *Lisbon Story* (Wim Wenders, 1994).

Academics and critics consider the close association between film and the city to result from the simultaneous emergence of cinema with the rapid increase in urbanisation during the twentieth century.<sup>13</sup> In line with their peers in other disciplines, film scholars have drawn on a plethora of theoretical writing around

the city/urban space. They have employed the work of Lefebvre and Foucault as well as other critical perspectives, from Marxist theory to feminist, poststructuralist and postmodern thought, to develop insights into the cinematic representation of city as a space and place.<sup>14</sup>

Yet, despite the range of analytical paradigms and, indeed, Mexico City's status as a 'postmetropolis' (Soja, 2000: 218), there has been little work to date on the cinematic representation of Mexico's capital. The one book dedicated to Mexico City in film, David William Foster's book, *Mexico City in Contemporary Mexican Cinema* is a text that, despite its title, does not engage visually with the city to any extent. Foster's city is a scenic background, a loosely defined, homogeneous area in which he sets his reading of thirteen films produced between 1971-1999 under three section headings, 'Politics of the City', 'Human Geographies' and 'Mapping Gender' (Foster: 2002). The actual physical representation of the urban environment through close visual analysis is elided by non-cinematic, socio-historical and political analysis of the films. Despite the value of his readings, I would suggest that Foster's analysis is restricted, as he does not consider the relationship of the films' characters and themes in relation to the visual representation of the city. A critical consideration of how this relationship is constructed and its historical precedents would provide cinematic evidence of the themes he examines in the films and, indeed, the films' varied production contexts. Ultimately, while the title of his book suggests a critical engagement with Mexico City, the city remains under-explored, relegated to a shared, common backdrop against which the diverse narratives of the films are played out.

Although Erica Segre (2001), likewise, discusses Mexico City in her lucid article on images of displacement in Mexican cinema of the 1940s and 1950s, her use and analysis of the term cinematography is inappropriate (Segre, 2001). Segre formulates her discussion of cinema through photography and despite her

inclusion of cinematographers who had started their careers as photographers (amongst whom she includes Figueroa), she applies an analytical methodology more appropriate to critical studies of photographs rather than film. In her use of José Revueltas's discussion of film images as a paradigm, her consideration of movement is purely in terms of montage.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, Segre (and indeed, Revueltas) confuse cinematography (the fundamental aspects of which are camera movement, movement within the frame, lighting and their relationship to composition) with editing. As a result, despite her enlightening conclusions, she fails to engage critically with the filmic images that are central to her discussion, ultimately viewing them as a series of photographs, not as films.

This lack of engagement with the cinematographic construction of Mexico City resonates with the absence of such analysis in relation to the Mexican rural space. To embark upon a complete analysis of Figueroa's cinematic rendition of Mexico City merits a long and complex study in its own right and is an area still ripe for further research. I have, therefore, chosen to limit my examination to Figueroa's cinematographic rendition of the urban space in relation to the films' characters. I shall concentrate specifically on how the visual representation of female characters corresponds to public and private spaces in the city and how this relates to the notion of motherhood prevalent in the production contexts of these films.

Through cinematographic analysis of *Salón México* and *Días de otoño*, I shall examine how Figueroa visually constructed Mexico City and the characters of Mercedes and Luisa, in films that were produced at different historical moments in the early period of Mexican urban expansion. In the discussion of Figueroa's manipulation of compositional planes, camera movement, lighting and his presentation of a specific urban space, the *azotea*, I shall explore how the city becomes a site of transformation and transgression for the women in

the films. Further, I shall suggest how Figueroa's images encapsulate the ambiguity between post-revolutionary nationalist images of the mother and the changing role of women under the pressures of modernity.

### **Public and Private Places**

Significantly, both *Salón México* and *Días de otoño*, have female characters as the main protagonist. *Salón México* is about Mercedes, a cabaret hostess, who works in the nightclub to secretly support her younger sister at a private girls' school. A pimp, Paco, who uses and abuses her, controls Mercedes. Lupe, the club security guard who knows of the situation with her sister, offers to marry Mercedes so she can give up prostitution. However, when Paco threatens to reveal the truth about Mercedes to the school she shoots him and he, in turn, kills her. In *Días de otoño*, Luisa, a naïve, small-town girl, arrives in Mexico City with a letter from her recently deceased aunt. It is a letter of introduction to Don Albino, the owner of a patisserie, requesting that he give Luisa a job. This he agrees to do. It becomes quickly apparent that Luisa is a daydreamer. However, as the film develops, her daydreams transform into a neurotic psychosis in which she invents a husband and baby, whilst rejecting the possibility of a relationship with the widower Albino and his two small sons. The film concludes somewhat uneasily with Albino proposing to help Luisa and marry her. This motivates Luisa to give up her fantasy child (her husband has already 'died' in an accident) supposedly to live happily ever after with Albino.

In *Mexican Cinema/Mexican Woman* (1996), Joanne Hershfield presents a detailed discussion of *Salón México* in relation to the social and economic changes during the 1940s that changed the role of women in Mexican society. Hershfield positions the film as a *cabaretera*, a genre that, she states, foregrounds female sexuality and desire to expose the anxieties around social transformation during the 1940s. The move to modernity, Hershfield argues,

made conflicting demands on women caught between the traditional roles of a nationalist discourse, 'motherhood, chastity and obedience', and the new potential for financial and social independence. She then proceeds to examine the film in the context of what she defines as a 'patriarchy in crisis' (Hershfield, 1996: 83-84).

Whilst Hershfield's analyses are compelling, her use of the Malinche/Malintzin paradigm ultimately restricts her reading of the film.<sup>16</sup> The dichotomy suggested by the Malinche stereotype does not allow for complexities beyond a Catholic-based, madonna-whore model. Moreover, although Hershfield discusses space in the films, her analysis is brief. From the general terms of public and private space, her argument, is based on socio-economic dichotomies between private/home space and public/non-domestic spaces (parks, museums, cinemas and streets) and how they represent sites of patriarchal domination and in the case of *Salón* operate to connect women to an 'imagined notion of Mexican national identity' (Hershfield 1996: 101). This analysis, although useful, does not fully account for the internal contradictions in the film that are made apparent on closer examination of the visual construction of the film's spaces. When one examines Figueroa's images of the women within the filmic space, a more complex representation emerges than that suggested by Hershfield. The complexity becomes apparent on examination of how Figueroa navigates the image in the diverse filmic topography that embodies manifold economic, social and moral meanings.

Though not immediately apparent, there are significant similarities between the spaces of *Días de otoño* and *Salón México*. Although in *Salón México*, it is a nightclub that is the predominant public place that Mercedes inhabits and for Luisa in *Días de otoño* it is a patisserie, both are spaces where commodities are exchanged. They are places where the women actively engage in the relevant commerce to earn their living; in Luisa's case it is decorating and selling cakes,

for Mercedes it is dancing and selling her body. They are commercial sites and therefore, accessible by most urban social groups, from upper to lower classes. Both Mercedes and Luisa also inhabit a private space. Each woman lives in a room on an *azotea* (a rooftop maid's room). The rooms are a signifier of class/race, in that they are inhabited only by the lower classes, Mestizo, or indeed, the unseen but present urban Indian.<sup>17</sup> In both films, the rooms, set high above the city, are sites of transition and transgression between social and sexual roles, fantasy and reality, life and death. Connecting these public and private spaces are the transit areas of streets and stairways that the women constantly traverse.

The cinematography and narratives of both films present both the public and private spaces in ways that underline the anxiety, uncertainty, and cultural crisis provoked by modernity in Mexico during the mid-twentieth century. Certainly, Mercedes and Luisa are women in crisis. Both are women alone. They are single, orphaned (their mothers are dead and their fathers are not mentioned) and struggle to survive in Mexico City. Significantly, they both strive to replace absent mothers. Mercedes becomes her sister's surrogate mother and Luisa creates a fantasy pregnancy and baby son. In both cases, their maternal role necessitates subterfuge and deception. Mercedes assumes the image of a business woman, with long working hours and a position that takes her away from the city, to hide the fact that she earns the money to pay for her sister's school fees by prostitution. Luisa uses padding to simulate a pregnancy and creates an elaborate fantasy as a young mother until she finally deposits her imaginary son at the doors of an orphanage.

Despite the presence of potential male partners in the narratives, none of the men represents a conventional patriarch to complement the matriarchal roles the women assume. Mercedes is used and abused by the pimp Paco and although Lupe appears to potentially fulfil a supportive role, he ultimately



### *Salón México*

The first shot of the film introduces the viewer to the dancehall *Salón México*. A low angle of the neon sign dominates the screen and together with the film's title, establishes its main narrative space. In the sequences that take place in the club, Figueroa works with a full range of shots, from big close-up to wide shot. In all set ups, Figueroa draws attention to the edge of the camera frame by framing bodies half in shot which spill out of frame to convey a sense of freedom and the spontaneity of the club setting. The action beyond the frame implies a world outside of the diegesis and, therefore, outside the viewer's viewpoint. Figueroa's framing and composition together with the multi-layered soundtrack of music, effects and dialogue, work to suggest an unseen, hidden world beyond the confines of the frame. His use of low-key lighting combined with grading of the negative in the laboratory to exploit the full range of blacks and whites, exaggerate skin tone and texture to create a sensuality in the dancers, musicians and their movements.

Distinct from these shots, which convey the exuberance and physicality of the club, Figueroa uses a tight mid-shot to introduce Mercedes and Paco (DVD clip 6). The shot contains and frames the couple. It exaggerates the disciplined moves of the *danzón* to demonstrate the control Paco exerts over Mercedes. The tight framing expresses the sexual and emotional tension between the couple and contrasts dramatically with the sense of freedom conveyed in other shots of the *Salón* (DVD clip 7). With the use of a key light placed high above the couple and a rotating ceiling fan, Figueroa creates intermittent shadows on the faces of Mercedes and Paco that in turn expose and hide them. The sequence at once demonstrates the liberal atmosphere and pulsating life of the *Salón*, the main arena for Mercedes, yet simultaneously Figueroa introduces the sense of her entrapment in the world of the club that ultimately leads to her death. The cinematography suggests a contradiction between the public space

of Salón México as being a place of sensual and physical pleasure and liberation, yet simultaneously a place of restrictions and threat.

Figuerola's representation of the school space also challenges its apparent symbolic function. In the narrative the school may be seen as the antithesis to the Salón. It is a 'decent' place, an institution for girls, governed by a strict matriarchal headmistress, who extols the virtues of womanhood and maternity. The institution is evidently a private finishing school that educates and prepares young women for, one assumes, marriage and the role of mother. Yet, it is precisely the space where a major internal irony on motherhood is most evident. Mercedes, the heroic mother substitute manages to fund her sister's preparation for maternity and monogamy at the school by working as a prostitute. The irony is underscored by the visual construction of the school which is loaded with double meaning. The viewer always sees the school in the daylight, in direct contrast to the Salón, which is seen exclusively at night. Figuerola works with the light in both the exteriors and the interiors of the school to create an image that lacks the sensual delight and texture of the Salón and its clientele. The students of the school are all upper middle-class creole girls, whose white complexions are emphasised by full key and fill lights. Unlike the scenes in the club, Figuerola does not vary the intensity between fill and key and consequently creates a bland, flat texture that emphasises whiteness and denies sensuality. Neither is there the variety of shots that the club sequences have. Figuerola restricts the scenes mainly to long-shot, mid-shot and mid close-ups and many compositions in the school use barred windows, doorways, counters and desks to bisect the frame to divide and contain characters to suggest the oppressive and repressive milieu of the upper-class society.

The scene that introduces the headmistress of the school is an example of the way in which the narrative function of a character is defined through

cinematography (DVD clip 8). Mercedes stands on one side of a long counter that stretches across frame, divided from the headmistress who stands facing her on the other side. Long, bar-like shadows created by a strong key light through the window, stretch ominously down the wall behind the headmistress and a strong shadow bisects the space between the women to divide them within the frame. The sequence intercuts from a long shot to a two-shot over the shoulder of both women. The headmistress dominates the scene throughout. In the two-shot over her shoulder towards Mercedes, she takes up two thirds of the frame, whereas in the reverse shot over Mercedes's shoulder, Mercedes barely fills one-half of frame. Conversely, in the long shot the headmistress faces camera, whilst Mercedes has her back to it. At the end of the scene, as Mercedes leaves frame, the camera pans left to finish on the headmistress in mid close-up, centre frame. Both the women represent motherhood in the film and Figueroa's visual treatment of them and the spaces they occupy echoes the complex attitudes to the mother and prostitution that had been at the forefront of national debate a decade earlier, the resonance of which was still felt in the post-war years.

In 1940, eight years before the film went into production, in order to distance the government from the sex industry, President Lázaro Cárdenas abolished the 1926 act that had been introduced in an attempt to control prostitution through governmental intervention. The heated discussion that had led up to the abolition was complex, but one of the central conundrums in the debate was that motherhood, a central icon of national identity and post-revolutionary ideology, applied not only to morally acceptable family women, but to what were perceived as immoral women as well. The majority of prostitutes were also mothers and it proved impossible for the government to at once condemn and criminalise those prostitutes who were forced into the sex industry in order to support their families, whilst it simultaneously relied on notions of maternal duty and sacrifice as central to Mexican society.<sup>18</sup> The narratives in films of

the 1940s reflect the ambiguous attitudes to the sex industry that developed in the 1930s and that led to the eventual abolition of the 1926 regulatory act, as well as the notions of motherhood that were problematised during the process.<sup>19</sup>

The complex duality and ideological hypocrisy towards prostitution and motherhood that is revealed on examination of Figueroa's cinematography is demonstrated in a sequence that follows Mercedes's meeting with the headmistress. Mercedes takes her sister (who is unaware of her profession) to the Museo Nacional, a space of national ideological repute and significance. The sisters wander around the exhibit of pre-hispanic sculpture. They stop in front of a large, Aztec stone head of Coyolxuahqui. Figueroa frames the head in low angle, so that it dominates the space between the two sisters, who stand in mid close-up, facing each other. The dominating and oppressive presence of Coyolxauhqui is significant when one considers her meaning in Mexican pre-hispanic myth/theology.<sup>20</sup> In the Aztec myth, the sexuality of Coatlicue, (Coyolxauhqui's mother) is celebrated and vindicated by her giving birth to the Aztec's central deity Huitzilipochtli and the destruction of her detractors, the jealous daughter Coyolxauhqui and *Los cuatrocientos*, who condemn Coatlicue because she does not know the father of the child Huitzilipochtli. Therefore, in the context of the myth, Figueroa's composition of Mercedes and Beatriz in relation to the sculpture resonates with the complex attitudes towards motherhood and female sexuality inherent in the relationship between Coyolxauhqui and her mother Coatlicue. The myth predates the Malinche/Malintzin paradigm and it is significant that Figueroa and director Fernández chose to shoot Mercedes's dialogue in front of the Coyolxauhqui and not in front of one of the many representations of Malinche/Malintzin.<sup>21</sup>

Whereas in the Spanish colonial Malintzin paradigm, woman is interpreted as both traitor to her race and progenitor of *mestizaje* in a Catholic

Madonna/whore duality, in the Aztec myth Coatlicue is protected and worshipped as an earth mother and is presented as a positive, life-affirming model. Consequently, in the use of a nationally significant space, the Museo Nacional, and the reference to an archetypal pre-hispanic matriarch, Figueroa and Fernández reveal a central contradiction in the society and politics contemporary to the film's production. This contradiction is the ideological dilemma of an image of the matriarch who works to fulfil her responsibility to provide for her children independent of a patriarch (Coatlicue) and an image of the mother as whore to the patriarch (Malinche/Malintzin). When one compares the visual construction of this scene with the scenes of Mercedes and the headmistress in the school and the scenes in the Salón, a contradictory message emerges. The decent and ideologically acceptable school is lacklustre and repressive. Figueroa's static compositions emphasise containment and the lighting flattens and de-textures the image. By contrast, the politically unacceptable den of iniquity, Salón México, is presented in a rich variety of compositions, textures and lighting that expresses a liberal, racially and culturally open space.

Paradoxically, although the matriarchal headmistress inhabits the 'decent' space of Mexico, the school is restricted and confined by visual formality and ideological naïvety. On the other hand, despite Mercedes's entrapment in her relationship with Paco, her public habitat, the Salón, is visually and culturally diverse, sophisticated and open. Her role and function as mother-substitute is unquestioned and, indeed, supported by Lupe, the doorman of the Salón. What emerges is a set of contradictions, within contradictions. The school, representative of a socially and politically acceptable space, with its conventional view of women and motherhood, is ultimately repressive and reactionary. Ironically, the Salón México suggests alternatives to the backward-looking structures imposed by the school. However, these alternatives expose the schism created by modernity between the nationalist

image of woman as mother and the reality for most women living in the city space. In *Salón México*, the only way to resolve such a fundamental ideological fissure is to kill off Mercedes. Her murder is an uneasy conclusion to a narrative that does not provide satisfactory closure.

### ***Días de otoño***

The struggle between political pragmatism, ideology and morality in *Salón México* is completely elided in *Días de otoño* by the representation of motherhood as a delusional fantasy. Released fourteen years after *Salón México*, the 1962 city space in *Días de otoño* is one of faceless traffic and hard, bright streets. The patisserie where Luisa works has none of the sensuality and excitement of Mercedes's *Salón*. Rather, it is comparable to the school, an angular space of even lighting that denies texture and depth in the frame to evoke a sterile atmosphere. The majority of compositions in the secondary public spaces of Chapultepec park, the streets and the church, San Juan Bautista are a combination of eye level, mid-shots and establishing long-shots. Figueroa chooses to maintain in these spaces the even light of the patisserie. He avoids shadows and the print appears to be slightly over-exposed to mute detail and add to the flatness of the image. Unlike *Salón México*, where the cinematographic space alternates between the sensuality of the salon and the sterility of the school, in *Días de otoño* Figueroa maintains a consistent, even, slightly diffuse light whether in exterior street scenes or interiors of the patisserie. His handling of the public spaces evokes a repressive, barren atmosphere and captures the alienation of the rural Luisa within the urban space.

In the patisserie, Luisa, the naïve, provincial girl is presented in direct contrast to Rita, the streetwise city woman (DVD clip 9). Luisa, dark-haired, small and sombrely dressed is the visual antithesis of Rita, with her peroxide hair, tight-fitting clothes and high heels. Rita is presented as the archetypal modern

woman. She has a job, is independent and has a range of lovers. However, in the last quarter of the film she confesses to Luisa that all she really wants is to settle down, marry and become a mother. Ironically, her desire to convert her life to the traditional role of wife and mother is provoked by her admiration of Luisa's marriage and motherhood which, unawares to Rita, are her friend's delusional fantasy. Consequently, the film literally sets up an unreal, bizarre image of Mexican motherhood in the modern space. As in *Salón México*, mothers are absent. Don Albino has children but he is a widower. The other women who work in the patisserie, like Rita, are single and childless. It would appear in the two films that modernity disrupts the conventional family structure and the result for the woman is death or, as in Luisa's case, delusional behaviour that elides contemporary reality. In their attempts to fill the gap left by absent motherhood both Mercedes and Luisa transgress accepted social boundaries. Figueroa chooses to visually express this transgression in the private spaces the women inhabit. In both films this space is where they live, simple rooms on *azoteas*.

### **Private Spaces and Public Transgressions**

Halfway through *Días de otoño*, Luisa moves from a *vecindad* to an isolated room on the rooftop of an office block. Her move is provoked by the deceit of her fiancé, Carlos. Having waited in vain for Carlos's employer to collect her for their wedding, Luisa takes a taxi and discovers that there is no ceremony booked at the church and no sign of Carlos. The priest looks up Carlos's workplace number and calls. He hands the receiver to Luisa who is told by the irate maid who answers that Carlos is already married – to her. Luisa, in her bridal gown, runs from the church. As she arrives at the *vecindad*, jeering children chase her to her room. She falls asleep and wakes later that night. Looking at herself in the mirror she asks '¿por qué?'. She then swivels the mirror and it swings up and down, the camera intermittently catching her face

in its reflection, whilst erratic reflections bounce around the room (DVD clip 10).

It is never clear in the film whether Carlos actually exists and the fact that at the end of the bridal sequences she wakes up, alone in her room, contributes to the ambiguity. The viewer and the other characters in the film only learn about Carlos when Luisa suddenly announces that she is to be married. Her account of how they met is full of dream references. She talks of floating 'sobre un lago como si fuéramos soñando' and how 'todo es como un sueño'. In the flashbacks that accompany her story, in three shots out of four, Carlos is seen lying down with his eyes closed, as if sleeping. Her workmates never meet Carlos and he only appears in the narrative in relation to Luisa's words, that is, he never appears outside of Luisa's own imaginings. The uncertainty as to whether Carlos exists or not is never resolved in the film, but when Luisa moves to the *azotea* her decision to pretend that Carlos and she did marry transmits him firmly into fantasy. Not only does Luisa embark on the fantasy-deception of the marriage, but after a few weeks, she invents a pregnancy as well.

The mirror scene is the first indication to the viewer of Luisa's psychosis and it is the first time that the viewer has more information about Luisa than the characters in the narrative. Figueroa's framing, combined with the dark expressionistic lighting of the scene, foreground the disorientation caused by the swinging mirror and conveys Luisa's breakdown and the schism she experiences between fantasy and reality. When Luisa moves to the *azotea*, Figueroa uses expressionist lighting and short depth of field to communicate visually Luisa's isolation and her delusional double life. As in *Salón México*, Figueroa uses the modernist city icon of flashing neon signs and flickering lights at times in the narrative when the characters reach crisis point (DVD clip 11). In *Salón México*, the neon sign flashes through the window of the hotel room as Mercedes stealthily steals back her money from Paco. The light rhythmically



exposes and hides her throughout the scene, to suggest the duality of her character and the contradictory morality of a narrative that at once condemns and praises Mercedes. Figueroa uses the light motif again in the scene in which Paco appears in Mercedes's *azotea* room. In their struggle they hit the lamp bulb, the erratic movements of which scatter fractured shadows around the room. In the midst of this chaos of movement and uncontrolled light, Mercedes murders the pimp. In *Días de otoño* Luisa constructs her married life from a book as the flashing neon signs expose and hide her changing reactions. When she begins to switch her bedside lamp on and off Figueroa transforms the scene into a pulsating, visual metaphor of her psychosis.

The private spaces inhabited by Luisa and Mercedes are physical, mental and social transit sites. Mercedes undergoes a transformation from a lower class, abused prostitute to a middle-class, respectable business woman; Luisa transmutes from a provincial, lonely girl to an urban, settled, married woman. In both cases the transformation is connected to an image of motherhood. Mercedes as the bourgeois career woman can become the surrogate mother for her sister and Luisa as a conventional housewife can convert herself into a model mother for a fantasy child. Ironically, in the process of transformation into ideal mother-providers, the women transgress accepted social roles and boundaries. For both Luisa and Mercedes deception appears to be the only option open for them to establish and retain an acceptable place in society. For Mercedes, surrogate motherhood justifies socially unacceptable prostitution, for Luisa the only means she has to establish status, whilst at the same time hide her actual self from society, is to construct a cocoon of fantasy and delusion. In so doing the women highlight the hypocrisy of state and society in its expectations of women and their interpretation of motherhood.

Figueroa's cinematography constructs these private spaces, not just as a physical representation of the rooms where Luisa and Mercedes live, but as the

psychological, social and political worlds they inhabit. His cinematographic representation of the women within the fictional place reveals the inner workings of the characters that question nationalist notions of motherhood in relation to concepts of modernity. In so doing, Figueroa renders visible the ideological ruptures inherent in the script.

## Conclusion

The cinematographic rendition of urban space in *Salón México* and *Días de otoño* comments on the very modernity that gave rise to the cinema. In common with other cinematic images of the city, Figueroa's Mexico City reveals the problems of a nation in frantic development from a rural to an urban economy and demography. In Mexico, the ideological fractures that developed between revolutionary nationalism and the drive to modernity were evident in the narratives and the presentation of characters projected on the screens of the nation. The ideal of the mother, a historically established national icon, was threatened by the new directions modernity offered to women and the changes it brought in social and family structures. In his portrayal of Luisa and Mercedes in relation to the urban space, Figueroa exposes the ambiguities surrounding motherhood in modern Mexico and the consequences of social hypocrisy and repression.

Seen within the wider social context, Figueroa's images echo the unacknowledged, but ever-present, ambivalence successive government regimes experienced, between the drive to modernity and the need to establish national sovereignty and identity. However, such ambiguities were politically advantageous for the ruling elite, which used them as part of a systematic hegemonic practice of social capitalism promoted by the state. The subsequent anxiety, uncertainty and crises this deliberately nurtured ambivalence provoked is projected onto the screen through Figueroa's lens. The cinematography in both *Salón México* and *Días de otoño* situates the characters in their

surrounding spaces to expose their duplicity, instability and vulnerability in relation to the city they inhabit. The consequent rupture between the superficial visual beauty of the images and the inherent ugliness of the dislocation, repression, madness, isolation and death that affects these characters in the filmic space, exposes a complex of fissures and links between the ideology within each film and the socio-political context that surrounded their production.

What Figueroa expressed on celluloid was the dislocated experience of the modern Mexican space. The images remain locked into the popular memory of Mexico, not only for their impressive aesthetic, but also for the inherent dark fissures they expose. From a microcosm of the pre-Hispanic universe, Mexico City came to represent the nation. This nation-city, so intimately transformed and influenced by notions of modernity, provided the space in which the inherent ambiguities of modernity could be laid bare. Figueroa's cinematography revealed the dislocation of women/the mother through the experience of modernity to reveal the unstable foundations of the city-nation.

The following chapter explores how Figueroa visually articulated the repercussions of modernity in his work with Luis Buñuel. The collaboration, which has been overlooked in studies on Buñuel, was a key professional and creative partnership for both filmmakers. Their work together not only communicates the social crises brought about by the drive to modernity, but also demonstrates transnational mechanisms that relate both to economics and politics and to the aesthetic and narrative development of Mexican cinema.

---

<sup>1</sup> See Miriam Hansen (2000) for an account of how early cinema embodied modernity and expressed the massive shifts in the social infrastructure and relations. See also Branston (2000) and Charney and Schwartz (1995). For an in-depth discussion on the conceptualisation of space (both real and imagined) in relation to modernity see Massey (2005: 62-80).

<sup>2</sup> In the last ten years, excavations in the Cathedral revealed that there was a settlement before the Aztecs arrived. By 1325, they had begun to build their city, Tenochtitlán, on top of the remains of pyramids dating back to the time of the Teotihuacán civilisation. Little more than a century later, the Aztecs had built an empire that stretched from north of Tula and south to the borders of what is now Guatemala and they dominated the land from coast to coast. Central to this empire was Tenochtitlán.

<sup>3</sup> In her introduction to her recent book, *For Space* (2005), Doreen Massey creates a fascinating hypothesis about how the Aztecs and Spanish conquistadores imagined and experienced the space and time of Tenochtitlán in different ways and how such differences informed the conquest. See Massey (2005: 1-4).

<sup>4</sup> For a seminal text on Mexican baroque and colonial architecture see Fernández (1959). For details on the syncretic development of art and architecture in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries see Tovar y Teresa (1988) and Ono (1996).

<sup>5</sup> See Pierce (2004: 28-29) for an account of the synthesis of styles and custom in architecture. Also see George Kubler's classic 1965 text for a detailed analysis of how the both Spanish and Indian design combined to form a new, specifically Mexican, architectural aesthetic.

<sup>6</sup> The work of the production designer is intimately connected to that of the cinematographer. Both sit at the conjunction between the fictional world of the narrative and the physical expression of that world. Both link industrial processes and aesthetics. Designers, like cinematographers, insist on adhering to the script's demands, yet they share the same tension between commitment to the script and the creation of a space/place that visually expresses the multiple and complex realities of the narrative. For a detailed analysis of the work of the production designer and the tensions involved in the construction of cinematic space see Tashiro (1998: 6-7).

<sup>7</sup> See for example, *Río Escondido* (Emilio Fernández, 1949), *Las Abandonadas* (Emilio Fernández, 1944), *El Rebozo de Soledad* (Roberto Gavaldón, 1952), *Los olvidados* (Luis Buñuel, 1950), *Él* (Luis Buñuel, 1952) and *Hombre de papel* (Ismael Rodríguez, 1963).

<sup>8</sup> This is apparent in the contemporary editorial of the journal *Revista Mexicana de Literatura*, launched in 1955 and edited by Carlos Fuentes and Emmanuel Carballo. The publication supported and promoted what it termed internationalism in writers. The first issue included an article by Jorge Portilla who attacked what he calls the McCarthyism of critics who declared that writers such as Paz, Arreola, Rulfo and Fuentes were insufficiently Mexican. See van Delden (1998: 4).

---

<sup>9</sup> The foundations of the complex system of contradictions that emerge in the notion and use of the term modernity within post-colonial contexts are examined in Dube (2002) and Mignolo (2002).

<sup>10</sup> For example, Guillermo Bonfil in his book *México profundo* (1987) reiterates the view that beneath the trappings of modernity a deeper, still dominant Indian culture exists that can inform a new kind of national identity. See Lomnitz Adler (1992: 247-252) for an astute and lucid critique of Bonfil's view.

<sup>11</sup> Porfirian refers to the period of the second presidential term of Porfirio Díaz which ran from 1884-1911. Urban development of areas such as Colonia San Rafael and Avenida Reforma in Mexico City reflected European influence, particularly the French Beaux Arts architectural movement that defined Porfirian style.

<sup>12</sup> See López (2000) and Stam and Shohat (1994) for accounts of the foundations of transnationalism in Mexican cinema.

<sup>13</sup> See Massey and Lurie (1999: 229-231) and also Kracauer (1995), Bruno (1997) and Donald (1999).

<sup>14</sup> During the past forty years, critical study of urban development has grown alongside film theory and criticism. Urban research has ranged from dialectical analyses of the city in relation to the rural, to a widespread adoption of theories of space, founded in the pioneering work of Henri Lefebvre in the 1970s and Foucault's extension of his work a decade later. Both Lefebvre and Foucault examine space in the same way as other historical material, making explorations of its politics, ownership and relations to power. More recently, it has been claimed that city space actually no longer exists; having been overtaken by multiple urban spaces that have no centre, but co-exist within and in relation to each other, see Soja (2000, 1996 and 1989). The extensive range of analysis of cities can be seen in the growing number of academic and critical anthologies dedicated to urban studies, which include articles and essays that encompass economic and critical theory, urban planning and psychoanalysis.

<sup>15</sup> Revueltas defines film as a series of stills, juxtaposed through montage. See Revueltas (1947).

<sup>16</sup> See Hershfield (1996: 13-23).

<sup>17</sup> The rooftop room is where, traditionally, the maids live. They come to the city from rural areas to work as cleaners, cooks and nannies for the occupants of apartment buildings or houses. Here, they eat and sleep and share washing facilities and a toilet. The *azotea* is, therefore, positioned as a space that embodies the divide between race and class in the city. The room is usually included as part of the maid's salary. Many maids are from Indian communities. It is significant that in most films of this period images of Indians were not set in an urban context, but reserved for films in rural settings. In some cases, where a room is unoccupied it might be rented at a minimal cost to an independent tenant, as is the case in both of the films discussed in this chapter.

<sup>18</sup> See Bliss (2001) for a revealing account of prostitution, public health and politics in early twentieth century Mexico.

---

<sup>19</sup> See for example *Las Abandonadas* (Emilio Fernández, 1944), *Aventurera* (Alberto Gout, 1949), *Salon Mexico* (Emilio Fernández 1948), *Bugambilia* (Emilio Fernández, 1944).

<sup>20</sup> Briefly, Coyolxauhqui was the daughter of Coatlicue, a serpent-headed, earth-mother goddess of the Aztecs. Coatlicue was also the mother of four hundred warriors known as *Los cuatrocientos*. One day, whilst Coatlicue was sweeping the temple of which she was guardian, she miraculously conceived another child. Coyolxauhqui, shocked by her mother's pregnancy and the fact that Coatlicue did not know who the father was, jealously accused her mother of being a whore. Coyolxauhqui rallied her four hundred brothers and they marched on the temple to kill their mother. As they arrived at sacred hill/pyramid of Coatepec, on which the temple stood, Coatlicue gave birth to a fully formed warrior, Huitzilopochtli, the sun god, deity of fire and war. Huitzilopochtli cast his brothers up into the heavens to become the Milky Way and threw Coyolxauhqui from the temple down the hill/pyramid. The fall dismembered his sister and she lay destroyed at the foot of the steps.

<sup>21</sup> Significantly, Hershfield does not acknowledge the subject of the sculpture, but interprets the stone head in general terms as representative of the pre-hispanic world and consequently that Fernández's intention was to link past to present in order to connect the women to his notion of a timeless Mexican identity (Hershfield, 1996: 101). See Franco (2004) for an analysis of Coatlicue in relation to Mexican nationalism.

## Chapter Six

### Exterminating Visions, the Collaboration of Figueroa and Luis Buñuel<sup>1</sup>

The best explanation of this film is that, from the standpoint of pure reason, there is no explanation.

(Luis Buñuel, opening titles *El ángel exterminador*)

I've found the trick of working with Luis, all you have to do is plant the camera in front of a superb piece of scenery, with magnificent clouds, marvellous flowers and when you're ready, you turn your back on all these beauties and film a stony track or a lot of bare rocks.

Gabriel Figueroa (Aranda, 1972: 108)

Given the above statement by the director Luis Buñuel, it is ironic that scholars from a wide range of academic disciplines have explained his films at great length. Since his début as a filmmaker in 1928, a large body of literature has emerged, conferences organised and, in more recent years, websites established, that analyse the work of this Spanish surrealist from a range of psychological, political and social perspectives.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, as film scholar Ernesto Acevedo-Muñoz has observed, most critical work concentrates on two 'peaks' of Buñuel's career: his surrealist trilogy (*Un chien andalou* (1928), *L'Âge d'Or* (1930) and *Las Hurdes* (1932)), and the Spanish and French films made in the 1960s and 1970s (Acevedo-Muñoz, 2003: 2).

However, the abundance of critical material on Buñuel notwithstanding, there is a significant absence. Despite the extensive analysis of symbolism and narrative function, it is notable and, indeed puzzling, that the construction of the image and its relationship to narrative/content has received scant critical attention. In short, there is little critical study of the cinematography and significantly, when it is acknowledged, it is usually in relation to the films Figueroa shot.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, rather than examine Figueroa's work as a collaboration with Buñuel, critics tend to assume that Buñuel dominated a

petulant, romantically-inclined cinematographer and pulled him into line. Such views are based on anecdotal evidence rather than empirical proof.<sup>4</sup> This paucity of critical study accentuates the dismissive attitude towards Figueroa's input in Buñuel's 'Mexican films' and further indicates a lack of informed insight into the fundamentally collaborative nature of film production.

Peter Evans encapsulates the opinion that Figueroa was creatively restrained on Buñuel's films when he writes about *Los olvidados*:

The nearest that the film allows him [Figueroa] to get to capturing the shapes and patterns of nature comes in a scene where huge cactus plants force their way into the frame. Nothing here, then, of the reedy riversides and cloud-embroidered horizons of *María Candelaria*.

(Evans, 1995: 76)

Evans's perception of Figueroa's work as a cliché of skies and landscape resonates in many of the references to the cinematographer's work to date.<sup>5</sup> This dismissal of Figueroa's work as a repetitive visual platitude prevents critical exploration of the ways in which he developed a visual style appropriate to each director's narrative vision. Consequently, the importance of Figueroa's creative contribution to the films he worked on, particularly those with Buñuel, has been ignored.<sup>6</sup>

Certainly, Figueroa's comment that opens this chapter is a humorous reference to the creative differences he and Buñuel encountered. Nevertheless, their disagreements formed the basis of a creatively fruitful collaboration. Buñuel's editor, Carlos Savage, commented that the director and cinematographer would argue, but always came to a compromise that best served the aims of the film (Savage: 1999). Carlos Fuentes, one of the few commentators to recognise the importance of their creative partnership, summarises the relationship neatly:

[C]ada uno le ofreció al otro, en cierto modo, la caricatura crítica de sí mismo, pero la plástica "idealizada" de Figueroa contenía [...] la



plástica "miserabilista" de Buñuel y ésta, de nuevo aquélla. De la síntesis de semejante tensión habría de nacer una de las más perfectas colaboraciones de la historia del cine.

(Fuentes, 1988: 30)

Fuentes's perception that the Figueroa-Buñuel collaboration formed a synthesis of styles is backed up by Figueroa himself in an interview in which he talks about his working practices with Buñuel:

Au sujet de la photographie, c'était autre chose. Il [Buñuel] ne s'y intéressait pas et n'y prêtait pas attention. C'est pour cela qu'il n'avait pas un bon sens du cadre. Plus tard, il m'a convaincu qu'il maîtrisait mal cela: "chaque fois que mon cadre est mauvais, dites-le-moi et je le corrigerai".<sup>7</sup>

(Thoyer, 2000: 98)

As discussed in previous chapters, Figueroa's use of light, composition and his manipulation of the film stock in his work with directors such as Emilio Fernández, Roberto Gavaldón and Ismael Rodríguez, highlights many of the contradictions in films which, on a narrative level, appear to support the status quo. With Buñuel, he adapted his visual expression of the narrative in order to complement and support Buñuel's inherently subversive vision as a filmmaker.<sup>8</sup>

Just as Figueroa's partnership with Emilio Fernández is seen as central to the so-called *época de oro* and 'classical' Mexican cinema, his collaboration with Buñuel may be viewed as an expression of the nation's move to modernity during the 1950s and 1960s. The overt nationalist message that disguised the fundamental transnationalism of the Mexican economy and political scene in many films of the 1930s and 1940s, was no longer tenable in the 1950s ideology of modernisation and progress that looked to the US as its development paradigm (Acevedo-Muñoz, 2003: 7). Moreover, the transnational conjunction between the Spanish/European Buñuel and the

Mexican/American Figueroa is another manifestation of the latent transnationalism present throughout the history of Mexican cinema that is discussed in Chapter Two. What the Buñuel-Figueroa collaboration demonstrates is the mechanisms of transnationalism during the 1950s and 1960s, not only in economic and political terms, but also in relation to creative practices in the development of Mexican filmmaking.

Buñuel entered an industry that went into a steady decline throughout the 1950s. Mexican producers preferred to back poor quality, formulaic projects, developed for maximum box office return rather than risk more challenging productions that had the potential to nourish the failing creativity of the industry. The closed-shop policy of the union, in particular the directors' guild, made it impossible for new talent and ideas to emerge and distribution, under the monopoly of Jenkins and his associates, favoured US imports to the detriment of national production.<sup>9</sup> The industry had become a close-knit, nepotistic 'film bourgeoisie', with productions funded and produced by a small number of producers and directors who were often related (de la Vega, 1995: 91). The burgeoning stagnation and decadence of the Mexican film business resulted in a production crisis.

Prompted by the change in ideological focus, the relationship between state and culture moved into a period of transition during which there was a call for a revision of the economic, historical and cultural achievements of the revolution. Buñuel actively engaged with the debates that arose during this time, a period that has since been defined as the 'crisis of the national' (Acevedo-Muñoz, 2003: 8). Ernesto Acevedo-Muñoz has proposed that Buñuel saved Mexican cinema, as he provided an 'indispensable link' between the so-called classical period, *la época de oro* and the *Nuevo Cine* movement of the 1960s (Acevedo-Muñoz 2003: 5 and 150-151). On the other hand, John King suggests that Buñuel was somewhat of an anomaly in the Mexican industry and that he 'remained an eccentric to the dominant modes of filming and left very few traces in terms of influence or disciples in Mexico' (King, 1990: 130). I would rather concur with Acevedo-Muñoz's proposal that 'Buñuel was an instrumental

piece in the complex puzzle of the nation's film history' (2004: 13) and that his 'greater contribution to Mexican cinema is perhaps to have initiated an articulate, critical strand, a new tradition in Mexican cinema' (2004: 150). Hence, although Buñuel was situated outside of the mainstream, as King rightly points out, paradoxically the director's position at the margins of the industry was to exert a profound influence on the future direction of Mexican filmmaking.

The proposition that Buñuel left a legacy for Mexican cinema through the introduction of a set of innovative practices is borne out by the formation of the *Nuevo Cine* group at the end of the 1960s.<sup>10</sup> The group's members enjoyed close links with Buñuel and a double issue of their journal was dedicated to analysis and critique of the director's work. However, there is a significant, paradox in the acknowledgment of Buñuel's films as the *agents provocateurs* of a new cinematic tradition that rejected the perceived reactionary aesthetic and content of the purported *época de oro* and its aftermath: Namely, the majority of Buñuel's films were shot by Figueroa. Certainly the films cited as most influential to the development of Mexican contemporary cinema are a product of their collaboration.<sup>11</sup> Ironically, as one of the principle representatives of 'classic' Mexican cinema, Figueroa is seen as the exemplar of the nationalist cinematic stagnation against which Buñuel's work is set. Indeed the renowned French critic André Bazin wrote:

Certes il y avait chose dans *María Candelaria*, et même dans *La Perla*, que de belles images; mais il était aisé de voir, d'année en année, le formalisme plastique et la rhétorique nationaliste se substituer au réalisme et à la poésie authentique. La surprise exotique passée et les prouesses de Figueroa définitivement réduites aux morceaux de bravoure techniques, le cinéma mexicain s'est trouvé rayé de la géographie critique. [...] Si l'on reparle du cinéma mexicain, c'est grâce à Luis Buñuel.<sup>12</sup>

(Bazin, 1975: 77-78)

Bazin's position is echoed by subsequent scholars and critics of Figueroa's work who focus on his collaboration with Fernández and repeat the assumptions that are demonstrated most clearly in Ramírez Berg's work on Figueroa, as discussed in Chapter Two. Indeed, Acevedo Muñoz, taking his lead from Alejandro Rozado and Héctor García Canclini cogently argues that the 'classical' work of Fernández demonstrates resistance to the processes of modernisation and that the trauma of Mexico's drive to modernity was countered by Figueroa's romantic images. He concludes:

If the image of classical Mexican cinema was one of moral resistance to modernization, then the image of Mexico's submission to modernization, which Buñuel dramatizes as one of hopelessness and a completely amoral existence in *Los olvidados*, would be the epitome of what was "anti-classical" in Mexican cinema.

(Acevedo-Muñoz, 2003: 72)

Such fundamental disregard of Figueroa's role in Buñuel's productions serves to repudiate the complex development, not only of Figueroa as cinematographer, but also of Mexican filmmaking from the 1950s onwards. The critical neglect of Figueroa's contribution to Buñuel's productions also functions to perpetuate the opinion of Figueroa as a reactionary creator of 'classical' national cinema. As a consequence, Buñuel remains the *auteur* who single-handedly saved and transformed Mexican film into a progressive cultural form. Due to unchallenged assumptions around Buñuel as an *auteur*, critics fail to recognise that he relied on Mexican filmmakers such as Figueroa to develop his vision and, therefore, Figueroa, together with other filmmakers, was integral to the changes that took place in the Mexican industry. However, this is not to suggest that Figueroa was an iconoclast who set up icons of national identity during the 1930s and 1940s to later smash them. Rather it is to recognise that Figueroa evolved and developed as a filmmaker. As a result, a meaningful analysis of Figueroa must consider his work as part of a career-long process, not isolated within specific historical moments.

In this chapter, I examine Buñuel's work in Mexico in relation to his most consistent collaboration with a director of photography, Gabriel Figueroa.<sup>13</sup> In different ways, both filmmakers were exiles. Buñuel spent most of his life outside of his native Spain. Figueroa's social hybridity accentuated the displacement that I argue is integral to one's experience as a Mexican. After a brief consideration of the ways in which notions of exile and 'otherness' correspond to the experience and work of Figueroa and Buñuel, I explore both filmmakers as 'outsiders/insiders' in relation to the social and moral themes conveyed through visual style in *Los olvidados* (1950). Through close analysis of *El ángel exterminador* (1962) and *Él* (1952) I examine how Buñuel and Figueroa employed expressionist conventions and gothic tradition and how they construct a film language that both communicates and challenges the central themes of each film, to provide a subversive insight into the internal workings and demise of the bourgeoisie.

### Insiders/Outsiders

Por Buñuel en el megáfono y Figueroa en la cámara confluyen dos corrientes del arte universal: la española y la mexicana....

(Cuevas, 1988: 58)

Buñuel doit être considéré comme un auteur hispanique plutôt qu'espagnol. C'est seulement dans cette ambiance culturelle et esthétique qu'il se sent le plus à l'aise.<sup>14</sup>

(Almendros, 1985: 29)

In his study of Buñuel, Victor Fuentes (2004) investigates the notion of exile in Buñuel's films. Following on from the work of Marsha Kinder (1993) and Gubern (1976), Fuentes argues that Buñuel's films constitute a 'cinema of exile' (2004: 170). His compelling essay considers the director's work in the context of recent exile and diaspora studies. He considers exile as central to Buñuel's creativity in that it characterises not only the content of his films but also their

form.<sup>15</sup> Although Figueroa was resident in Mexico throughout his life, I argue that his experience of Mexico and his perception of the country corresponded to that of the exile. This is not to suggest that Buñuel and Figueroa shared the same view of Mexico. The cinematographer, with his formulation of epic landscape, stood in direct contrast to the director's urban vision of anonymous exteriors and claustrophobic interiors. The often-cited anecdote, used by Figueroa in the quote that opens this chapter, demonstrates their distinct perceptions of Mexico. Evidently, during the *Nazarín* shoot, Buñuel disagreed with Figueroa for his framing of the final shot and told him to turn the camera away from the beautiful clouds over Popocatepetl to reframe on a dirty track. The story is the only reference usually made by critics in relation to their collaboration and it is significant that Figueroa himself repeats it, if only in jest.<sup>16</sup> However, it is a noteworthy indication of Figueroa's acknowledgement of his differences with Buñuel and the compromises they both made in their work together. I argue that these concessions were made from a space of exile within which they worked through the contradictions they both experienced and shared.

Contradiction is central to Buñuel's work and exile, 'an insoluble contradiction' is a 'main creative force' in his films (Fuentes, 2004: 159). Significantly, the recent reappropriation of Buñuel in a Spain that has ignored the question of the director's status as an exile, an important absence when one considers that Buñuel was resident in Spain only until his twenties and, indeed, in his forties became a Mexican citizen (Fuentes, 2004: 159). Moreover, of the thirty-two films he directed, twenty were Mexican. Consequently, the major part of Buñuel's creative output as a director was developed and made in his adopted country (Pérez Turrent, 2001: 62). I propose that exile was also a compulsion in the imagination and creativity of Figueroa and that this mutual expression of exile, both internal and external, drew Buñuel to collaborate with Figueroa more than any other director of photography.

Whilst the notion of exile has, in general, been ignored in relation to Buñuel (the notable exception being Fuentes's analysis), consideration of Figueroa as

displaced might appear downright incongruous. Although not obviously an exile, Figueroa's movement between classes, his adoption of oppositional politics and his social hybridity made him an internal émigré.<sup>17</sup> Victor Fuentes defines exile as 'being in one place, but to have one's imagination focused elsewhere' (2004: 159). The ambiguity of Figueroa's social, political and professional position within Mexico, together with his complex situation in relation to Hollywood and the US, was the foundation upon which he created images of a Mexico that was 'elsewhere'. As I have already suggested in previous chapters and writings, Figueroa's images were at once present in the imagination of the Mexican audiences, yet topographically absent (Higgins, 2004: 216-217).<sup>18</sup> Indeed, it is a paradox that links Figueroa with Buñuel as transnational, 'extraterritorial' filmmakers and chimes with Fuentes's notion of the 'insoluble contradiction' of exile (Fuentes, 2004: 159).

In her analysis of Buñuel, Marsha Kinder evokes Homi Bhabha's formulation that 'the other is never outside or beyond us, it emerges forcefully, within cultural discourse, when we think we speak most intimately and indigenously 'between ourselves' (1993: 282). Figueroa's expression of 'otherness' could be articulated in similar terms as an internal visual dialogue that emerges onto the cinema screen. In *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991), Julia Kristeva sees the process of displacement as the experience of the 'stranger' whom she argues is as much internal as external. She/he is a sum of the social and psychological inconsistencies, integral in all of us, that we can refuse to accept or to which we can submit, but which we can never ignore. Continual transformation is the central dynamic of 'the stranger', who inhabits a constantly changing, transitory space, on an infinite journey. The contradictions manifest in successive Mexican political regimes and their ideologies are fundamental to the way the nation has developed and resonate with Kristeva's notion of the continual transfiguration of internal/external space. As a Mexican, Figueroa may be seen like Kristeva's outsider, the stranger who is a sum of internal contradictions brought about by his social context, yet who is also in a state of constant transformation. Indeed, Figueroa stated that his transfiguration of reality through the lens of a camera led to a transformation in himself (1995).<sup>19</sup>

In his compelling and moving set of essays, 'Reflections on Exile', Edward Said (2001: 173) observes that exile is 'the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between self and its true home'. His statement brings together the notion of external exile from place with the idea of internal exile from self. Significantly, Said goes on to describe the essential link between exile and nationalism as being 'like Hegel's dialectic of servant and master, opposites informing and constituting each other' and nationalism, he argues, is a result of alienation (2001: 176). The innate schism in the idea of estrangement evokes the fissures and rifts embodied by Kristeva's stranger and that corresponds to an understanding of the complexities of Mexican nationalism, discussed in previous chapters.

Following on from Said's and Kristeva's notions of rift, alienation and displacement, I suggest that exile is innate to the Mexican experience. Mexicans encounter displacement from their own space, time and culture in the same way as émigrés. Said's rift between 'self and a true home' resonates with the constant and consistent encounter with the 'other' in Mexico between the internal self (physiological, psychological and emotional as *mestizos*) and the external home (the everyday position in a post-colonial space) and results in a constant, simultaneous exile and homecoming. Being a stranger in one's own land becomes a dialogic existence that Figueroa externalises through the lens.

### **The Cinematographic Eye**

'The camera is the eye of the marvellous. When the eye of the cinema really sees, the whole world goes up in flames.'

(Luis Buñuel)<sup>20</sup>

Eyes have been important in Buñuel's work and also in Figueroa's. They have been literally assaulted by Buñuel with knitting needles and razors and exposed by Figueroa in his use of close-ups of wide, unblinking gazes. The tension between physically attacking perception (Buñuel) and exposing perception



(Figueroa), is central when looking at their work together. The cultural combination of the Spanish outsider/insider Buñuel with the Mexican insider/outsider, Figueroa results in an edginess that makes films such as *Los olvidados*, *El ángel exterminador* and *Él* so incisive in their social criticism.<sup>21</sup>

Perception is the key to Buñuel's films and is the key that Figueroa took to open up a new style and approach. The camera is the eye. It is ever-present, watchful, yet non-judgmental. Critical judgement in Buñuel's films is made on the soundtrack with the bang of drums, the roll of thunder, the sounds of guns, battles and the incessant bleating of sheep. Just as in *Las Hurdes*, where the camera sits and watches while the donkey is killed by a swarm of bees, the camera eye in *Los olvidados*, *Él* and *El ángel exterminador* watches and records. But it is not a dispassionate documentation. The eyes behind the camera-eye guide the gaze to question established ideas and to unsettle perception.

The wide-angle lens that Figueroa used in films with other directors such as Chano Urueta and Emilio Fernández opened up scenes, widened perspective and combined with infra-red filters and meticulous lighting, the cinematographer elevated the conventional melodrama of the script into epic super-reality.<sup>22</sup> Conversely, in Buñuel's films, Figueroa captures the sense of confinement within the limits of the realities the characters inhabit through the use of little or no depth of field. The planes of vision are flat and claustrophobic and when focal depth is used it works in conjunction with light and composition to emphasise the characters' isolation from each other.

Given his experience in the Mexican film industry of the 1930s and 1940s, Figueroa was an expert on the narrative and visual conventions of melodrama and knew how to manage these codes for subtly subversive ends. In his use of lighting and manipulation of film stock, Figueroa underlined many of the contradictions in, what on the surface, are films which support the status quo, throwing a shadow over the bourgeois liberalism that was central to most of the films on which he worked. With Buñuel, he continued to explore and

manipulate the conventions to complement and support Buñuel's cinematic aims.

A sense of being marooned is present in all of Buñuel's films, yet it is most evident in the Mexican productions. Each character in Buñuel's films is, in effect, a victim of a social shipwreck. The films communicate a need to escape the confines of the rational and launch into the sea of the unconscious. The need to embark upon a voyage to new perception underpins all the characters, yet most do not recognise their need and the few that do are prevented from acting by the self-imposed chains of perceived 'decency' and 'rules'. Figueroa's subtle manipulation of space and light work in conjunction with Buñuel's vision of inner solitude to create characters and worlds that are trapped within themselves. In *Los olvidados*, Figueroa exposes the bleak landscape of urban deprivation and the psychological and social confines that poverty imposes. The material opulence of *Él* and *El ángel exterminador* and the privilege the characters demand as members of the bourgeoisie serve to maroon the characters in their personal psychoses. From the poor to the ruling elite, Figueroa frames and isolates the characters within a Buñuelian space.

### **Moral, Social and Visual Contrasts in *Los olvidados***

In Buñuel's movies the seen and the ordinarily unseen inhabit the same film space; he pictures the picturable, and strongly alludes to what cannot be pictured.

(Wood, 1993: 44)

Michael Wood's perceptive observation of Buñuel's images leads one to consider the construction of space in his films. In the following analysis of *Los olvidados*, I investigate how Figueroa's use of light and shadow together with contrasts in space and composition, communicate complex themes that interweave with the displacement of the mother figure.

What strikes the viewer immediately about *Los olvidados* are the visual contrasts. The oppositions of darkness and light, the vast empty wastelands and cramped interiors, day and night. Throughout the film, these oppositions are set against each other to build a visual dialectic that reflects the contradictions and conflicts within the characters. The exteriors are vast, lit by an empty hard flat light of an urban wilderness. Construction is abandoned and only scaffolded skeletons of progress are left, the anonymity and timelessness of the urban space captured by Figueroa's choice to shoot at midday when the harsh, shadowless light flattens perspective.

In contrast to the exterior scenes in the interiors, Figueroa emphasises the claustrophobic, crowded and cramped conditions. The use of key lights focused on small areas confines space and the textured shadows that fall away delineate the edges of the interior spaces. Further, many compositions take in the ceiling and walls and wall-to-wall beds dominate every room, their iron frames throw shadows that entrap characters in prison-like bars of light and dark. The interior space is the site for the heightened emotional scenes. The shadowy barn, with its half-hidden animals is a primal space that threatens rather than comforts. It is a place in which the characters hide or seek refuge and it is the site of the ultimate struggle between Jaibo and Pedro, that culminates in Pedro's death. Yet, despite the cramped representation of the interiors and the use of group mid-shots and long-shots, Figueroa's lighting also separates characters to emphasise their isolation. He creates this paradox of solitude and claustrophobia with a key light focused on the main area of action and low-intensity fill lights which leave the dark corners in shadow and backgrounds beyond the main action in darkness.

One of the best examples of how Figueroa works with the contradictions and oppositions in the film that operate on multiple levels within the narrative is the scene between Jaibo and Pedro in the cutler's shop (DVD clip 12). The main oppositions are within the characters themselves. The boys each have light and dark elements to their characters which are constantly in flux. It is an ebb and flow which creates in the viewer a visceral awareness of the grey areas

between and within the two to generate in the viewer a compassionate detachment. Like two planets in orbit, each one moves constantly from near/light side to far/dark side within themselves (internally) and to each other (externally). Each boy is a double of the other and the highly theatrical space that Figueroa constructs in the cutler's workshop is a visual manifestation of the fluctuation between the internal and external, insider and outsider, light and shadow.

With the use of one key light source, Figueroa fills the shop with layers of light. The viewer's eye is directed from the darkened foreground over the lit table and the glittering lights to the straight, dark angles of the bellows and Pedro silhouetted against the brightly lit background, hazy with wood smoke. Figueroa isolates the interior from the exterior. The high contrast created by a full backlight as the main light source through the exterior door makes silhouettes which together with the glow of the fire and the smoky atmosphere constructs a *Niebelungen*-like cave, underscored on the soundtrack with the rhythmic clanging of a hammer on white-hot steel. Jaibo enters and is silhouetted against the door frame, a diabolic, faceless figure, barely recognisable through the smoke. Throughout the scene, the boys move between areas of light and shadow, from silhouette to distinct form, to underline the battle between good and bad, the struggle between circumstance and opportunity. Figueroa frames the boys throughout nearly all of the two shots with one of them against a clearly defined background light and the other against a sharply defined area of dark.

The viewer never sees the boys together in Pedro's home, yet they both have pivotal scenes with the mother in the cramped communal dwelling. The mother aggressively rejects Pedro, yet passively and then seductively accepts Jaibo. In these scenes each boy is lit to reflect the complex working through of the son-mother/male-female relationship. With Pedro, this complex turns on the ambiguity and conflict with the mother and with Jaibo it is the development from a surrogate son to a lover. Figueroa lights Pedro as luminously innocent, and then, through the stark use of contrast and shadow, as aggressive and

confused. Jaibo continuously moves back and forth between dark shadow and light. In the seduction scene the lighting and focal depth soften both the mother and Jaibo, to isolate the pair from their surroundings and to draw them together in the complicity of seduction.

In Mexico, the mother is perceived as an icon, the foundation of national creation myths, both the mother of God in Coatlicue and the betrayed Mother in Malintzin.<sup>23</sup> The loss and duality of the mother in the myths are fundamental to the contradictions in the formation of national identity discussed in Chapter Two. *Los olvidados* is essentially about the lost or absent mother. Pedro is rejected by his mother, Ojitos has only a father who is also absent and he is left to suckle a goat as his substitute nurturer. Meche's mother is an invalid and confined to bed and Jaibo's lack of mother leaves him with only a fantasy of her, that of the *Virgen*. I argue that Figueroa's visual representation of Jaibo and Pedro expresses aspects of poverty, social injustice and the deep contradictions in the foundation myth of the mother and its effects on Mexican national identity. The social reality shown in the film challenges the myth of the mother. For this reason, Buñuel cannot be seen, to ally himself with social realism, because in this film and, indeed, all of his work, the mythic is equally pervasive in and influential on reality as social conditions and circumstances.

In *Los olvidados* Buñuel attacks the gut of Mexico to present the viewer with a world in which mothers are absent, or worse, reject their offspring. In showing a society where the mother-virgin, becomes the mother-lover, he presents an Oedipal society.<sup>24</sup> Buñuel's mother-virgin-lovers are not the martyrs one finds in Fernández films which comfortably support the national *complejo* of veneration and victimisation. The tough presentation of the Mexican mother in Buñuel's films suggests a route to subversion, which if followed would lead to a true revolution in the Mexican psyche. This is why, in exposing the imperceptible chasm between Mexican myth and Mexican social reality, in *Los olvidados*, Buñuel was so heavily condemned in Mexico.<sup>25</sup>

Figueroa establishes the binary paradoxes of the film visually, working with the director to present the viewer with two alternative resolutions in Jaibo and Pedro, each of which ends in darkness and death. Rather than simply establish the two characters as narrative and visual opposites, Buñuel and Figueroa work together to communicate the complex internal conflicts in the individual that result from poverty and social injustice. The visual presentation of *Los olvidados* may superficially resemble the documentary aesthetic of the Italian neo-realist style but under closer, more detailed analysis of the cinematography it is clear that the visual style plays with the cinematic conventions of melodrama and German expressionism.

Consequently, through lighting and composition, Figueroa makes explicit profound levels of meaning that constitute Buñuel's world view. As Peter Evans states, '*Los olvidados* moves beyond the prose of documentary and into the Mexican Gothic, transforming dross into metaphor, the ordinary into the fantastic, the known into the unknown and disturbing' (1995: 78). In his study of Buñuel, Evans employs a Freudian psychoanalytic paradigm to analyse the director's work. In his discussion of *Los olvidados* he makes a connection between the gothic tradition and Freud's essay on the uncanny. The innate links between psychoanalysis and the gothic tradition have formed the basis for a substantial body of scholarship that has, in turn, informed analysis of the horror genre in film studies. Rather than add to the by now considerable body of psychoanalytic analyses of Buñuel's work, I will analyse the gothic tradition evident in *El ángel exterminador* and *Él* from a socio-political standpoint. Darkness and death, so fundamental in the content, form and visual language of *Los olvidados* is central to the gothic tradition. In these films Buñuel and Figueroa develop the gothic in relation not to the underclass, but to the tradition's established social environment, the ubiquitous mansion of the bourgeoisie and the ruling elite.

## The Bourgeoisie in *Él* and *El ángel exterminador*

I don't believe anyone is morally determined forever because he was born in such-and-such a social class. Being born bourgeois doesn't condemn anyone to think or behave like a bourgeois for his entire life. Co-existence changes one's manner of being [...] If you and I were forcibly locked up together, [...] we would almost certainly end up hating each other.

(Luis Buñuel)<sup>26</sup>

After the international success of *Los olvidados*, two key films in the Buñuel-Figueroa collaboration position themselves far from the impoverished locations of that first film. Both *El ángel exterminador* (1962) and *Él* (1952) are situated in the privileged space of the bourgeoisie. In *El ángel exterminador* a group of dinner guests are inexplicably unable to leave the music room of their host's house. Over the days and weeks they are trapped, the neurotic turmoil of their internal selves erupts and destroys the well-mannered superficiality of their external behaviour. The eruption of psychosis is the main theme of *Él*, in which the protagonist, the upstanding pillar of the church Francisco Galván de Montemayor (Arturo de Cordóva), crumbles into a paranoid delirium during the course of which he loses his hold on reality and attempts to circumcise his wife.

Both films examine and dissect the capitalist class, the owners of society's means of production and bulk of its wealth. The term bourgeois carries with it an inherent sense of materialist values and conventional attitudes. Its root dates back to the French sixteenth century, late-latin word *burgus*, meaning castle or fortified house. Buñuel's incisive definition of the bourgeoisie takes the home/*burgus* as fundamental to his depiction of a ruling class that jealously guards the privilege of its social space, the material expression of which is the house, the mansion or the stately home. Buñuel reveals that in its protection of wealth and social advantage, the bourgeoisie imprisons itself literally within the

walls of the home whilst it metaphorically incarcerates itself within class ideology.

The *burgus* is central to Buñuel's narratives and is the site where characters unravel and degenerate. In *El ángel exterminador*, dinner party guests are inexplicably trapped in the music room of a mansion and in *Él*, the overwhelming presence of an eccentric house and Francisco's frenzied pursuit of a hopeless legal case to regain lost family properties traps him into a cycle of repression, violence and potential castration. Entrapment in the confines of the *burgus* forces the characters to express the deep values and morals that lurk underneath the niceties of acceptable behaviour.<sup>27</sup> In so doing, Buñuel's characters either slip into paranoia and psychosis or die. Consequently, the construction of space is central to Buñuel's vision of how the bourgeoisie functions and is the key to its potential collapse. As cinematographer, Figueroa constructs the filmic space that constitutes the *burgus*. In both films Figueroa visually links the characters' relationship with exterior, physical space to their interior emotional and psychological state. Therefore, a close analysis of the way in which the cinematographer manipulates space in both *Él* and *El ángel exterminador* illustrates the Buñuelian definition of the bourgeoisie and consequently heightens the subversive impact of both films.

Intrinsically linked to this construction of the bourgeois narrative and visual space in the two films is the use of gothic convention. Indeed, there is a direct reference to the gothic in the opening scenes of *El ángel exterminador*. The host, Edmundo Nóbile, proposes a toast to Sylvia, one of the guests, for her performance (they have just watched her sing in the title role of Donizetti's opera *Lucia di Lammermoor*). The opera is an adaptation of Walter Scott's gothic novel which comments on the demise of the ruling class brought about by extreme changes in the main characters of the book and in external events. Scott's nineteenth-century novel, in keeping with other gothic narratives of the period, is a critical examination of the conflicts between the *nouveau riche* nobility, the traditional, aristocratic landowners and the developing bourgeoisie, themes that resonate throughout Buñuel's œuvre.<sup>28</sup>



*El ángel exterminador* and *Él* reverberate with gothic motifs. The primal gothic space of the castle/mansion and the key elements of the curse, darkness and omens, internal conflict, madness and physical and psychic changes of state are present in both films. Further, the key gothic concepts of duality, entrapment and the darker, inner self that overcomes the outer 'civilised' self are central to the development of the films' main characters.<sup>29</sup>

In keeping with Buñuel's vision of the bourgeoisie, Figueroa develops a gothic visual language drawn from the motifs and style of German expressionist cinema, which he learned from his mentor Toland. Toland was a former apprentice of the renowned cinematographer Karl Freund who believed 'the cameraman ought to create shadow. That is much more important than creating light' (Sears, 2003: 170). In his early films, *Der Januskopf* (*Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde*) (Murnau, 1920) and *Metropolis* (Lang, 1927), Freund developed what Fred Botting calls the 'modernist Gothic' in film. This distinct visual style draws on the narratives and archetypes of the gothic novel to create an imagery of high contrast, heavy shadows, acute angles and distorted sets to express the dark, supernatural and political themes inherent in the gothic tradition (Botting, 1996: 165-168). In Hollywood Freund developed the 'modernist Gothic' further and in so doing founded the signature style of the horror genre through the seminal films *Dracula* (Browning, 1931) and *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (Florey, 1932) and his directorial works *The Mummy* (1932) and *Mad Love* (*The Hands of Orlac*) (1935). Buñuel, together with the surrealist group in Paris, had a fascination for the gothic novel that fed into surrealism through symbolism.<sup>30</sup> This, combined with the direct influence of Karl Freund on Figueroa, provoked an elaborate interplay of themes, texture and space in *Él* and *El ángel exterminador* that further developed 'modernist Gothic' imagery.

## Gothic Style and Alienation

[P]rovided that the exile refuses to sit on the sidelines nursing a wound, there are things to be learned: he or she must cultivate a scrupulous (not indulgent or sulky) subjectivity.

(Said, 2000: 184)

The deep-focus, long shots that introduce the dinner guests as they enter the mansion in *El ángel exterminador* continue during the dining-room sequence. The eye-level tracks from behind the serving table draw attention to perspective and locate the viewer as an observer. Later in the scene, the high angle left-to-right track down the dining table reveals the guests in greater detail and underscores the conscious distance between the viewer and the characters. Edmundo offers a toast to which the guests respond conventionally (DVD clip 13). When the sequence is repeated the bourgeois norms of behaviour begin to break down. The guests ignore Edmundo and talk over his speech. As in the repeated entrance of the guests to the mansion, the action and the camera position change during this repetition. The camera angle together with the change in action distance the viewer in a technique reminiscent of Brecht's alienation theory (*Verfremdungseffekt*) in which the artifice of the drama is made transparent in order to detach the viewer.<sup>31</sup> The 'subjectivity' proposed in the above quotation from Said is not a self-centred, 'indulgent' view but rather, as he suggests, a basis for incisive critique. Figueroa, with the exile's eye, uses a technique that provides the viewer with a space in which to retain their objectivity and not identify with the characters. His combination of long tracking shots and expressionist/gothic composition and lighting in both *El ángel exterminador* and *Él*, work with the dialogue and action to distance the viewer and provide a critical, objective space that accentuates Buñuel's razor-sharp critique of the bourgeoisie.

## The Gothic *Burgus* and Bourgeois Space

The exile knows that in a secular and contingent world, homes are always provisional. Borders and barriers, which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory, can also become prisons, and are often defended beyond reason or necessity. Exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience.

(Said, 2000: 185)

The dominance of wide shots and long tracks at the opening of *El ángel exterminador* change to mid long-shots and mid-shots in the music room. When the guests realise they are trapped, the lighting becomes more expressionist and as the social niceties break down in the group Figueroa flattens perspective. The entrance to the music room from the adjacent drawing room resembles a proscenium arch. The room becomes the stage on which the action unfolds. On three occasions the room is framed in extreme long shot with the butler Julio in foreground. As he stands and observes the action he assumes the viewer's position and draws attention to the place of the viewer in relation to the film's action. Eventually, Julio too is drawn into the room and is unable to leave. The camera, however, is able to enter and leave the room whilst the guests remain fixed and immutable. As exiles, Figueroa and Buñuel had an ability to cross borders and break barriers, to position themselves both inside and outside. In *El ángel exterminador*, with the camera movement in and out of the room, they position the viewer as an exile in a constantly mutable (yet critically objective) position in relation to the action.

During a gothic-like thunderstorm, Figueroa positions the camera in a wide-angle wide-shot from the drawing room to the music room (DVD clip 14). The foreground drawing room remains in darkness, lit only by the occasional flash of lightning. In the background of the frame the viewer sees the music room like a brightly lit stage in the darkness. The guests move around as aimless as the sound of the piano. The sense of watching a piece of theatre is once again evoked, but in the following shot the viewer is back on the stage with the

players in a reverse angle of the wide shot. Figueroa also uses tracks to take the camera through the arch that divides the music and drawing rooms and as a result accentuates the viewer's position as both inside and outside the action. Further, the absence of conventional point-of-view shots and reverse angle shots in the film prevent the viewer from being drawn into an empathetic relationship with the characters and the tracking shots distance the viewer from the action to create a cinematographic *Verfremdungseffekt*.

Moreover, the view of the music room and the characters' place within it is constantly challenged. The gothic struggle between the inner and outer self is made visually manifest as the narrative unfolds (DVD clip 15). Figueroa uses a variety of angles and lenses to provide a continual change in perspective. On one hand, he employs long-shots and mid-shots on a wide-angle lens with lighting set-ups that provide expressionistic layers of light and dark to create depth and width to the space. On the other, there are mid-close ups and close-ups shot on a short lens that flatten depth of field, to isolate characters from the space around them and each other. This change of depth and perspective is constant throughout the film. The visual dialectic that builds up between confinement and space captures the characters' contradictory responses to their situation and each other. It visually encapsulates the fundamental gothic trope of constant vacillation from the inner to outer selves expressed by the guests in their dealings with others and themselves in the movement from communication to secrecy, honesty to deceit, love to hate, decency to perversity, life to death. As the darker, inner selves emerge from the characters, Figueroa's lighting becomes more expressionist with the backgrounds often dropping into complete darkness and individuals lit in subtle pools of light. The bourgeois space becomes the gothic *burgus*.

### **The *Burgus* as Madness in *Él***

In *Él*, Francisco's outward formality and need for order stands in direct contrast to the style of his mansion. Designed by his father, the house is inspired by Art Nouveau. There are no straight lines in the architecture, the graceful curves and sensuality of the style made popular during the Porfirian era, is exaggerated

in *Él* to provide a subtle sense of spatial disequilibrium. In architectural terms the interior of the house lacks harmony and conventional proportion and the spaces are disconcertingly awry and claustrophobic. The rich chaos of line contrasts dramatically with the rigid symmetry of the stairway that dominates many scenes in the film as a central element of the *mise-en-scène* and are a physical representation of Francisco's stasis within his erratic and unstructured psychosis, represented by the flowing curves of the Art Nouveau that surrounds the straight, heavy lines of the steps. Further, the stairway is where Francisco's mental state becomes most evident in the scene in which he paces to and fro across the confines of the stairs, banging the railings with a stick, in a fit of frustrated manic rage.

Significantly, the exterior of the mansion is only seen in the brief scenes of the garden and when Francisco spies on Gloria (Delia Garcés) from his bedroom window. Like the mansion in *El ángel exterminador*, a high wall surrounds the house. Francisco's home is indeed the *burgus*, a luxurious lair that both protects and entraps. However, in *Él*, more so than in *El ángel exterminador*, the interior represents the inner self of the owner. In *El ángel exterminador* the exterior becomes a site of spectacle as crowds gather to wonder at the plight and reasons for the guests entrapment. By contrast, in *Él* the viewer experiences Francisco's psychosis from within. Francisco is a paradigmatic gothic character. His outer self is a paragon of decency and an exemplar of bourgeois noblesse oblige. His inner self, that overcomes the controlled exterior, is dark and psychotic. The cause for the internal character to surface is the imminent loss of the *burgus* and the impending threat of modern values and ideology, represented by the introduction of the engineer Raúl Conde (Luis Beristáin), into Francisco's reactionary world.

Whereas in *El ángel exterminador*, the *burgus* is a ubiquitous physical presence that entraps the characters within the music room, in *Él* the mansion is a manifestation of the larger, lost *burgus* that Francisco frantically tries to recuperate. As a bourgeois, his social, physical and psychological identity is intimately linked with the *burgus* and the increasing futility of his legal battle

to regain family property lost in the revolution is integral to his decline into psychosis.

Figueroa systematically structures the visual representation of Francisco's decline in the way he lights Francisco and Gloria in relation to one another and the spaces around them with a system of expressionist lighting, angles and framing throughout the film. He lights Gloria with a soft backlight to create a halo-like effect. The diffuse key and fill light soften her face and give it a luminous quality.<sup>32</sup> By contrast, Figueroa lights Francisco with a strong key light at an acute angle to the side of his face. The position of the light creates a hard shadow that bisects the face to give Francisco a literal light and dark side. Figueroa's use of diffuse backlight on one character and strong key light on the other in a two-shot is significant as it directly challenges the convention that characters should be equally lit in shot. In his choice to shoot the scenes between Gloria and Francisco in this way, Figueroa demonstrates a clear expressionist commitment to build character and narrative tensions through careful construction of the image. Further, in the Francisco-Gloria two-shots, shadows, architectural elements or furniture provide subtle barriers and divide the couple in frame. Francisco dominates the two shots with Gloria and combined with Figueroa's consistent use of low angle close ups, Francisco's overpowering presence pervades the film.

As Gloria and Francisco's relationship develops, Figueroa accentuates the light and dark, high angle and low angle camera positions and use of depth of field to express the deterioration of the couple and the destructive dynamic between them caused by Francisco's psychotic behaviour and which culminates in his visual and narrative breakdown in the cathedral bell tower (DVD clip 16). Figueroa uses a wide-angle lens to accentuate the acute low angle and the size of the bell looming above the couple. Figueroa sets the aperture for the interior and consequently the silhouette of the bell is exaggerated against a bleached-out sky. The low angle and dark silhouettes create an abstract image and as Francisco attacks Gloria in his attempt to push her out of the tower, the lack of spatial reference increases the sense of disequilibrium and danger. In the bell

tower Francisco's relationship with Gloria comes to the point of no return and he declines into psychosis.

Significantly, this final destruction of Francisco's marriage and sanity takes place in an archetypal gothic location. In the gothic tradition, churches and towers are spaces which simultaneously isolate and empower the characters and the inherent blasphemy of characters such as Count Dracula and Doctor Frankenstein are echoed in Francisco's psychotic declarations. The bell tower is also an extension of Francisco's *burgus*. He regards it as his natural home and his position as naturally equal to God. On his return to his mansion, Francisco paces the stairway, running and banging a stick back and forth over them (DVD clip 17). Figueroa's use of exaggerated depth of field, creates huge, bar-like shadows to run up the stairs and over the hallway and straight symmetrical lines of light and dark obscure the erratic curves of the Art Nouveau interior. Francisco entrapment on the rigid lines of the steps and his inability to move away from them communicates his impotence and frustration.

In his visual construction of the mansion and other spaces that represent the *burgus* in the film, Figueroa employs expressionist techniques to demonstrate the psychosis and isolation of Francisco. Like the guests in *El ángel exterminador*, Francisco is marooned in his space, isolated by his ideology.

*Él* and *El ángel exterminador* are exemplars of the convergence of surrealist, expressionist and gothic conventions. The inherent social censure of these traditions is understood and employed by Buñuel and Figueroa in the films and, indeed, in other productions on which they collaborated, to present perspicacious and provocative social critiques. In *Él* and *El ángel exterminador* the combination of Buñuel's direction and Figueroa's cinematography creates spaces in which the viewer can experience the dissection and visual extermination of the bourgeoisie.

### **Beyond the Buñuel-Figueroa Collaboration**

An acknowledgement and study of the ways in which Buñuel and Figueroa worked together broadens the way in which we understand and read the films on which they collaborated. Through contextual and close visual analysis of how Figueroa constructed the image in Buñuel's films, the fundamental influence of transnationalism on the development of creative practices in Mexican cinema is revealed. Further, detailed analysis of visual style substantiates the argument that cinematographers are central givers of meaning in film production. Moreover, a critique of the Figueroa-Buñuel collaboration demonstrates the breadth of Figueroa's work as a director of photography and his pervasive influence in the development of Mexican cinematic practice. Previous critical studies focus principally on the twenty-year period of Figueroa's collaboration with Fernández and position them as progenitors of the so-called classical Mexican style of the *época de oro*. Consequently, Figueroa's fundamental influence in the creative development of subsequent Mexican cinema has been elided, particularly in relation to *Nuevo Cine* and the changes in production structure and practice in the last half of the twentieth century.

The notion of exile explored in this chapter opens up a new way to read the work of Figueroa and Buñuel. The inherent 'outside'-ness of exile enabled the two filmmakers to assume a critical distance to the Mexican industry and the cultural contexts in which they worked. An acknowledgment of that distance facilitates a new position from which to read their films and consequently reveals fresh meanings and issues. Such a reading reveals ambiguities and contradictions that Buñuel and Figueroa expose in society, through a cinematic *Verfremdungseffekt* that enables the viewer to position themselves critically in relation to the fundamental issues of poverty, class and power in the films.

Filmmaker and critic Ado Kyrrou suggests that in his early films, Buñuel's dream-like style was created through an instinctive process to evoke reality far more potently than filmmakers who 'blinded' viewers with traditional cinematic conventions (1963: 16). Although Figueroa's son and assistant, Gabriel



Figuerola Flores, has said that Figuerola also worked instinctively, I argue that Buñuel and Figuerola based such 'gut-feeling' on empirical experience and an in-depth, intellectual understanding of filmic convention (Figuerola Flores: 2002). In the subversion of these traditional cinematic practices, the two filmmakers created a cinematic alienation effect that placed the viewer in a critical position in relation to the narrative.

Examination of the collaboration of surrealist Buñuel and expressionist Figuerola throws new light on the structure of Mexican society, its internal workings and psychoses. The concept of the *burgus* as the bourgeois powerhouse, alienation and the use of gothic tradition are areas for further investigation in relation to Buñuel's œuvre and, indeed Figuerola's work with other directors. The representation of class from a cinematographic viewpoint is also a realm for further consideration, particularly the ways in which class is represented cinematographically and the effects of transnational collaborations and co-productions on the representation of class in diverse cultures.

Figuerola worked with Buñuel on seven films over a fifteen-year period. It was the most consistent collaboration with a director of photography that Buñuel had. Indeed, he publicly cited Figuerola as his preferred cinematographer (Poniatowska, 1996: 106). Throughout their collaboration, the cinematographer and director challenged dominant Hollywood conventions to develop a visual style that subtly complemented the subversive narratives of the films. Figuerola's meticulous manipulation of expressionist technique within the conventions of the gothic tradition visually exposed the recurrent themes of isolation, social displacement, exile and madness in Buñuel's films.

The Figuerola-Buñuel collaboration was a creative partnership that not only produced a unique film language, but also expressed the transnational nature of cinema. For different reasons, both director and cinematographer were outsiders/insiders in Mexican society. From this place of mutual exile they formed a fascinating partnership that opens up new perspectives and directions for the enjoyment and critical study of both the Mexican and international film

industries.

---

<sup>1</sup> The title of this chapter and the analysis of *Los olvidados* is taken from my published essay *Exterminating Visions, The Collaboration of Gabriel Figueroa and Luis Buñuel* in Santaolalla, d'Allemand, Díaz Cintas, (eds) (2004).

<sup>2</sup> There are surrealist perspectives in even Buñuel's more conventionally commercial films.

Linda Williams gives a succinct discussion of the ubiquitous surrealism in the director's œuvre (1992: 151). Studies that demonstrate the wide range of approaches and the continuing interest in the director's work include biographical and anecdotal works include Aranda (1975); de la Colina and Perez (1992) and Buñuel's autobiography (1983). For publications that take gender and psychoanalytical theory as their main perspective, see Evans (1995); Williams (1992); and Sandro (1987). For ideological, historical and social approaches, see Kinder (1993) and Acevedo-Muñoz (2003). The papers given at international conferences to celebrate the centenary of Buñuel, *Buñuel 2000* in London and the *Congreso Internacional* in Madrid in the same year were published as collections in 2004 and 2001 respectively. The conferences and publications demonstrate the continued interest in the filmmaker and the wide range of critical approaches to his films. The plethora of websites and Buñuel-related material on the internet is evidenced by over a million hits on search engines that range from serious critical appraisals to trivia and anecdotes.

<sup>3</sup> Buñuel himself briefly talks about cinematic technique, specifically camera movement in *Él* and *Nazarín*, with de la Colina and Pérez Turrent (1992: 102). The director said of his relationship with Figueroa in an interview with Jacques Doniol-Valcroze and André Bazin of *Cahiers du Cinema* in 1954, 'I have to say that I didn't behave with him like a dictator [...] Figueroa is fantastically quick and very good. It's a guarantee. At the start he was terrified of working with me. We could never agree. But I think he developed a lot and we became very good friends'. Aranda (1975: 138).

<sup>4</sup> Examples of writers who use Buñuel-Figueroa anecdotes in their appraisal of their work together include Wood (1993: 45) and Aranda (1975: 83).

<sup>5</sup> See Bustamente (1931); Aranda (1975: 83 & 138); Mora (1982: 58); Ramirez Berg (1992) and Coldwell (1993).

<sup>6</sup> Pérez Turrent is a notable exception, when he writes in his obituary of Figueroa, 'En cada una de las películas con Buñuel el trabajo de Figueroa se ajusta a las necesidades de la obra, sin preciosismos, ni grandes cielos, composición en torno a una nube o a un maguey hasta llegar a la brutal belleza de *Nazarín*' (1997: 10).

<sup>7</sup> Photography was another thing altogether. He [Buñuel] was not interested in it and did not even pay attention to it. Because of that he did not have a good sense of framing. Later he

---

convinced me that it was difficult for him to overcome this: "everytime my framing is bad, tell me and I will correct it".

<sup>8</sup> Figueroa wrote: 'Luis Buñuel y yo estábamos en puntos un poco opuestos, porque yo era eminentemente plástico y estético y él era todo lo contrario, el no buscaba nada de eso absolutamente en sus películas. En lo único en lo que yo podía defenderme era en la iluminación, creando un ambiente que perteneciera a la historia que estábamos haciendo' (Figueroa, 1988: 213).

<sup>9</sup> See King (1990: 129-130), Mora (1982: 75-78 and 97-99), de la Vega (1995: 91-93) for concise overviews of the industry at this point.

<sup>10</sup> The *Nuevo Cine* group was formed from young intellectuals, writers and filmmakers, among them José de la Colina, Carlos Monsiváis, J.M. García Ascot, Rafael Corkidi, Salvador Elizondo, Alberto Issac, Paul Leduc, Fernando Macotela and Emilio García Riera. Many became the most important filmmakers and critics of their generation. Others related to the group included Carlos Fuentes and Gabriel García Márquez. The group produced a manifesto that called for greater transparency and access into the film industry, freedom of expression and exposed pressures of censorship. They demanded a film school be established and made an attempt to introduce serious film criticism into Mexico in the form of the journal *Nuevo Cine*. The journal based itself on auteurist theory and took André Bazin's work as its critical paradigm. The group viewed Buñuel as innovative and opening new directions for Mexican cinema.

<sup>11</sup> *Los olvidados* (1950), *El* (1952), *Nazarín* (1958) and *El ángel exterminador* (1962).

<sup>12</sup> 'There was admittedly something more than beautiful photography in *María Candelaria* and even in *La Perla*, but it is easy to see, year in and year out, that physical formalism and nationalist rhetoric have replaced realism and authentic poetry. With the exotic surprises gone and Figueroa's cinematographic feats reduced to fragments of technical bravura, Mexican cinema found itself crossed-off the critics' map. [I]t is entirely thanks to Luis Buñuel that we are talking about Mexican films again'.

<sup>13</sup> Of the thirty-six films Buñuel directed, seventeen were produced in Mexico and seven were shot with Figueroa. *Los olvidados* (1950), *Él* (1952), *Nazarín* (1958), *El fièvre monte à El Pao* (1959), *The Young One* (1960), *El ángel exterminador* (1962), *Simón del desierto* (1965). No other cinematographer collaborated so consistently with Buñuel.

<sup>14</sup> Buñuel should be considered a Hispanic rather than a Spanish auteur. It is only in this cultural and aesthetic atmosphere that he feels most at ease.

<sup>15</sup> See also Swain, M. (1995) for an analysis of the effects and results of exile on the surrealist movement.

<sup>16</sup> See Fuentes (1992: 29) and Aranda (1972: 108). In his unpublished autobiographical manuscript Figueroa writes, '[Y]o trabajé con él en siete películas en las cuales hay algunas anécdotas que me gustaría pasar, porque tiene un gran sentido del humor, y él y yo nos divertíamos y nos reíamos de nuestros chistes y la gozábamos en grande en realidad' (1988: 214).

---

<sup>17</sup> Figueroa was born into a bourgeois family, as was Buñuel. Despite the fact that he and his brother were orphaned and penniless at one point in their early careers, their cousin Adolfo López Mateos became President and members of their family held key positions in commerce and government. Thus, Figueroa shared with Buñuel an innate ability to negotiate, confront and reconcile himself on various levels, personally and politically. This developed in him a class and social hybridity that informed his whole approach to life and work.

<sup>18</sup> Chapter Two contains an analyses of Figueroa's paradoxical political, social and professional situation in regard to Mexico, the US and Hollywood.

<sup>19</sup> In his acceptance speech for the Premio Nacional de las Artes in 1971, Figueroa said:

'Al transfigurar la realidad con un implemento mecánico, la realidad me transfiguraba a mí mismo y me hacía crecer como un hombre entre otros hombres'.

<sup>20</sup> Buñuel quoted in Carlos Fuentes, 'The Discreet Charm of Luis Bunuel', *New York Times* magazine, 11 March, 1973.

<sup>21</sup> It is significant that the gaze or eye are constant references in relation to both Figueroa and Buñuel. Two important examples are the title of the 1996 centenary exhibition for Buñuel curated in the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, *Buñuel: La mirada del siglo* and the title of Poniatowska's 1996 book on Figueroa, *Gabriel Figueroa: La mirada que limpia*.

<sup>22</sup> Acevedo-Muñoz (2003), succinctly defines the Mexican melodrama as a general term covering discrete sub-genres which include the *cabaretera*, together with musical melodramas such as *Nosotros los pobres* (Ismael Rodríguez, 1947) revolutionary melodramas such as *Enamorada* (Emilio Fernández, 1946) and family melodramas such as *Cuando los hijos se van* (Juan Bustillo Oro, 1941) and *Una familia de tantas* (Alejandro Galindo, 1948).

Hernández Rodríguez also defines the link between social comedy and melodrama and their potential for social criticism and subversion, with particular reference to Buñuel's work (1999: 101-121). Mora defines the main generic themes of the melodrama as based on traditional values of 'God, Nation and Home', whilst he also includes heroism and loyalty (Mora, 1989: 57). Accounts of the cultural specificity and generic conventions of Mexican melodrama include López (1991; 1993) Burton-Carvajal (1997), Dever (2003) and García (1995). For studies that give detailed readings of the codes and conventions of the Hollywood melodrama genre see: Gledhill (1987), Thomas (2000) and Singer (2001: 37-58).

<sup>23</sup> See Chapter Five for analysis of the mother creation myth in relation to the Mexican cinematic national convention and Figueroa's cinematographic play with the mother image in other films.

<sup>24</sup> Andrea Noble (2005: 25-26 and 32-47) comments on the prevalence of incest in Mexican films of the late 1980s and early 1990s and goes on to give a reading of the ways in which the incestuous relationship in *La mujer del puerto* (1933, Boytler) and the 1991 Ripstein remake are resolved in relation to cultural modernity.

<sup>25</sup> See Buñuel (1994: 201-202) for an account of the initial criticism of the film in Mexico and subsequent universal approval. See also Evans (1995: 73).

<sup>26</sup> Buñuel quoted in de la Colina and Pérez Turrent (1992: 125).

---

<sup>27</sup> I use the word 'nicety' advisedly as it derives from the Middle English sense of 'foolish conduct' and the Old French *nicete* from the Latin *nescius*, ignorant, which is also the root for the contemporary Spanish term *necio*.

<sup>28</sup> For a detailed analysis of Scott's work in relation to his contemporary political context, see Garside (1984).

<sup>29</sup> There are extensive bibliographic references for the gothic. For good introductory overviews of the genre see Punter (2000), Markman (2000), Hogle (2002), Stevens (2000) and Williams (1995).

<sup>30</sup> Nadia Choucha (1991) provides an in-depth study of how symbolism and occultism (which drew on the romantic and gothic traditions) influenced Surrealism. Buñuel talks of his own enthusiasm for the gothic novel in de la Colina and Pérez Turrent (1986: 106). Whilst all of his work demonstrates an affinity with gothic themes there is a direct link apparent in his obsession with Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, for which he wrote a screenplay in the early 1930s and eventually directed in 1953 as *Abismos de pasión*. Ishii-Gonzalès (2004: 239-246) provides an insightful reading of *Abismos de pasión* that examines the affinity between Buñuel's work and that of Georges Bataille and Emily Bronte.

<sup>31</sup> For an enlightened and unusual comparative study of Buñuel and Brecht, see Stevenson (2004: 513-522).

<sup>32</sup> The presentation of Gloria is reminiscent of Figueroa's close-up portraits of Beatriz (María Félix) in *Enamorada* and María (Dolores del Río) in *María Candelaria*. Significantly, the Madonna-like presentation of Gloria, Beatriz and María, corresponds to scenes in which internal conflict and sufferance surface in the characters, whilst simultaneously, Figueroa presents the three actors as incarnations of the dominant Mexican feminine ideal, the Virgin Mary. In so doing, Figueroa asserts and reiterates the actor's 'divine' star status.

## Concluding Remarks

My contact with Gabriel Figueroa began in March 1989 when I visited him in his studio to seek advice on a film I was making for Channel Four about the photographer, Tina Modotti. I had heard that Figueroa planned to initiate a feature film based on Modotti's experiences in Mexico and over copious amounts of tea he generously and enthusiastically suggested ideas on how I might shoot the film. The most striking comment he made during our chat was that I should film the Mexican scenes in black and white. His reason was that to express the politically complex and difficult relationship Modotti and others had with the country it should not be camouflaged by colour, but explored through the bare bones of light and shadow, like the monochrome engravings and prints of Leopoldo Méndez and José Guadalupe Posada. His political aesthetic of a black and white Mexico fascinated me as a filmmaker and I asked if he could recommend a film for me to view. He picked up the telephone, called the Cineteca Nacional and two hours later I sat alone in a large auditorium to watch *La perla* for the first time. We shot the Tina Modotti film, but the executive producer insisted that the Mexican scenes remain in colour, as it would be what the audience would 'expect' of Mexico. I was struck at the time by the contradictory perception of the country between the British programme producer and the Mexican cinematographer and, moreover, by the producer's conscious need to feed the audience with an image of exoticism and otherness which he perceived as inherently and, indeed, garishly colourful.

During my twelve years of living, working and travelling in Mexico I came to understand, on an emotional as well as an intellectual level, what Figueroa had meant by his comment. From my work and friendship with photographer Mariana Yampolsky, my travels through the country with my husband and a surreal year spent as a production executive at the largest American television network, Televisa, I was faced with multiple realities and perceptions of Mexico. Trips to visit our Indian *compadres* in remote communities high in the Sierra interfaced with long lunches in fine restaurants with our *compadres* from the metropolitan bourgeois elite. Air-conditioned meetings with media

moguls in the US and Mexico ran alongside long sessions with a Huichol shaman to produce a video with which he could raise money for his community. It was through experiences such as these that I gained a privileged education on, and an awareness of the overwhelming social, political, economic and historical complexity of Mexico, which subsequently guided the trajectories of my research. My initial surprise at Figueroa's comments on Mexico changed the longer I lived in the country. The more I encountered diverse perceptions of the Mexican space, the more compelling I found his perception and the more aware I became of how Figueroa's images were etched into the national imagination. My decision to embark on an academic investigation of his work originated, therefore, from a direct experience of the country and a desire to investigate why Figueroa's films remain so integral to the national imagination.

As a filmmaker, I am acutely aware of the uneasy relationship between the practice of making films and programmes and theoretical interpretations of cinema and television. As a film academic, I am constantly aware of the divide between those who teach theory and those who teach practice. In this study, I draw on my experience as a filmmaker to inform my reading of Figueroa's role as a cinematographer and I build on my academic background to develop critical approaches to the images Figueroa created in order to further understanding of the processes that produced them. My professional position as both an academic and practitioner and my personal experience as a naturalised Mexican and British citizen situate my work in a place between, a professional and personal contact zone where diverse influences converge and re-form.

Significantly, the Mexican anthropologist Claudio Lomnitz Adler, who lives and works in the US, writes of a similar experience and situates his work on the margin as it is 'a bit too theoretically inclined for most Mexican social scientists, a bit too engaged with Mexican political quandaries for most of my American colleagues' (Lomnitz Adler, 2001: xix). Whereas in this thesis I concentrate on the creation and use of filmic space, Lomnitz Adler focuses on the concept of the national space and the complex, ever-changing arena in

which it is positioned. In the same way that Lomnitz Adler is compelled to acknowledge how his life experience informs his work, so am I. Convention dictates that academic studies should assiduously avoid personal and emotional content yet, paradoxically, it is the private passion for a subject which excites and sustains our professional interest. Figueroa's work engages me on both an emotional/personal and intellectual/professional level. Moreover, it communicates to many others in the same way, whether Mexican or non-Mexican, academic or other.

The long process of working on this study, part-time, over a number of years, which has included moving continents and substantial changes in the supervision and direction of my research, is reflected in the thesis. I have had to make difficult decisions on what to include and what to edit from the study and have reworked my writing technique as a filmmaker towards a style that would conform to the conventions of the PhD examination. Therefore, the preceding chapters which address and construct new ways of answering the complex questions that surround Figueroa are informed by my professional expertise, academic development and personal experience. The result has been to pull focus away from the anecdotal and biographical accounts of Figueroa and to shift towards a more critical engagement with his work that tackles the complicated conundrum posed in the introduction. Is Figueroa Mexico? Is Mexico Figueroa's? In order to do this, I have examined and unpacked the processes that gave Figueroa and his images the iconic status that has maintained a critical stasis around his work. As a consequence, I have proposed new positions from which to make fresh readings not only of Figueroa's work and cinematography in general, but also of Mexican cinema.

Such a change in critical perspective provokes a shift away from the strong current of national discourse traditionally employed in discussions of Figueroa (and indeed, Mexican cinema in general) to refocus and reframe his images within a transnational context. My critique of Charles Ramírez Berg's commendable, if restricted analysis outlines the prevalence and limitations of this national debate in relation to the work of Figueroa, whilst the exemplary



work of Seth Fein and Ana López, on transnational politics and economics, informs the critical paradigm that I deploy in the subsequent analyses of Figueroa's work. The use of the transnational approach advocated by Fein and López exposes the forces that determined and defined Mexican cinema's relationship to dominant ideologies in the post-revolutionary period and into the 1960s. In addition to the work of Fein and López, I draw on that of film scholars, Julianne Pidduck and Alistair Phillips. Although neither of these scholars writes specifically about cinematography, both centralise visual and spatial relationships in their analyses which link directly to an understanding of the role of the cinematographer and how the mechanics of cinematography is integral to the creation of meaning in a film. Pidduck's and Phillips's methodologies, as discussed in Chapter One, redress the bias that developed in film studies from one which privileged looking *into* films, to one which proposes new ways of looking *at* the film image and, as a result, reveals new and often surprising readings.

Consequently, the analytical models suggested by Pidduck, Phillips, Fein and López form the basis of a critical paradigm that I develop in Chapters Three to Five. Combining close visual analysis which concentrates on the technical construction of the image and spatial relationships with empirical socio-economic and political information, I have exposed the inherent transnationalism of the production contexts that undermined or problematised previously accepted readings of Figueroa's work. When, for example, in Chapter Three, I examine his cinematography of *Allá en el Rancho Grande* and the ways in which it interrelates with the music and its production context, the film is transformed. Instead of the reactionary position scholars have traditionally assigned to de Fuentes's film, the analysis reveals integral links between the nascent Mexican film industry and the transnational commercial interests of radio and recording entrepreneurs and consequently provokes a more dynamic, complex reading of the film. In Chapters Four and Five, examination of Figueroa's construction of the image exposes ambiguities between the films' discourses and the political, economic and ideological contexts within which they were produced. The analysis of Figueroa's rural

landscapes, which became the imagined and remembered Mexico, throws into relief how the cinematographer's construction of space and characters within the landscape conveys the complexity of race and class hierarchies inherent in notions of Mexican national identity. In the same way, Figueroa's representation of urban spaces, discussed in Chapter Five, reveals complex issues inherent in Mexico's drive to modernity and its effect on core national symbols, specifically the mother. Finally, the exploration of Figueroa's work with Buñuel in Chapter Six, situates Figueroa as an exile in his own country to suggest that his position as an 'outsider' may have enabled him to simultaneously communicate, whilst subversively challenging, the central themes of the films on which he worked.

Close study of Figueroa's work demonstrates that investigation into his choices of light, lens, filter and his manipulation of the film stock in the laboratory, work to expose a complex web of contradiction in the films. As argued in Chapter Two, some scholars, notably Charles Ramírez Berg, have noted these problematic fissures between the films Figueroa worked on and the ideological contexts in which he shot them, yet they paste over the gaps that the images expose with inadequately defined notions of *mexicanidad* and *lo mexicano*. As a result, they evade critical engagement with inherent complexities in the films. This study challenges the use of non-specific concepts of Mexicanity in relation to Figueroa's work and in so doing reveals the complicated relationship between his construction of images, their correlation with a narrative and a film's position in relation to dominant ideology.

On the one hand, in developing a critical paradigm that combines the work of Mexican cultural historians with that of film scholars, I explore ways in which the fissure between looking *at* and looking *into* films can be bridged. On the other hand, an examination of the conflation of Figueroa and the nation from a transnational angle reveals the national assumptions that surround his films. The adoption of such an alternative approach enables new readings of not only Mexican cinematic aesthetics but also cinematography across a range of production contexts.

Contrary to his image as a reactionary, national filmmaker of the so-called 'golden age', I have shown that Figueroa constantly developed and communicated the Mexican reality in which he worked through his creation of space on the screen. Figueroa's images resonate with the ambivalence that successive governing elites communicated as they negotiated between the need to establish a coherent national identity and the transnationalism inherent in the drive to modernity. As a result of this ideological vacillation, Figueroa captured on celluloid the dislocated experience that the modern Mexican space provoked. Therefore, far from being fixed within a particular historical moment in national film production, Figueroa was a fundamental influence on the creative development of Mexican cinema throughout the mid-twentieth century, particularly in relation to the *Nuevo Cine* group and beyond. His politics and life choices positioned him outside of the Mexican mainstream. In this study's acknowledgement of his 'otherness' and his position as an internal exile, new perspectives suggest alternative readings of the films on which he collaborated. Finally, my research pulls focus on Figueroa, not to situate him as dominant in frame and an alternative auteur, but rather to highlight the collaborative nature of filmmaking, specifically the relationship between the director and cinematographer and the production of meaning in a film text.

As stated in the Introduction, given the dearth of critical attention on Figueroa and cinematography, this thesis cannot pretend to be a definitive study. My intention has been for the research to act as a foundation for myself and other scholars to build upon. The study aims to provide a starting point for future investigation of Figueroa and other related areas. Because of constraints of space and time, I have concentrated this thesis on only eight films out of the more than two hundred on which Figueroa collaborated. Comparative studies of his work with various directors would provide further diverse and enlightening results. Also, I chose not to include Figueroa's work with the US directors John Ford, John Huston and Don Siegel in Mexico and how the vision of Mexico in *The Fugitive* (1947), *The Night of the Iguana* (1963), *Under the Volcano* (1983) and *Two Mules for Sister Sarah* (1969) compares with that of Figueroa's collaborations with Mexican directors. It is, however, a

compelling subject for future work. In addition, there remains much to extrapolate from the discussion of Figueroa's landscapes, both rural and urban in Chapters Four and Five and the development of the national space in the Mexican imagination. Moreover, the notion of exile in relation to Figueroa's images and the gothic tradition that are investigated in Chapter Six are other subjects that merit further attention.

Beyond an understanding of Figueroa's work, this study offers directions for more wide-ranging analyses of transnationalism and cinema in relation to national filmmaking practices and further critical study of cinematography and the work of individual cinematographers in relation to the political, economic, production and ideological contexts that surround their work. Consideration of the construction of cinematic space and realities, particularly in relation to new technological advances in cinematography and the use of computer-generated imaging is another area of cutting-edge research to consider.

The suggestions above are but a few possible subjects for future papers, articles, theses or books. For the moment, I am planning to use the research in this study as part of a documentary film essay on landscape, memory and time. From pre-production to exhibition, the issues and debates raised in this thesis will certainly inform the development and execution of the film. To be sure, Figueroa's legacy to me as an academic and as a filmmaker will be valuable not only on a visual level, but also in the wider conceptual framework of the production. After all, the intention is to produce a film that is both compelling to look *into* and *at*.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Acevedo-Muñoz, E. (2003) *Buñuel and Mexico: The Crisis of National Cinema*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- (2004) 'Text and Context: Luis Buñuel, Octavio Paz and Mexico', in Santaolalla, I. (et al. eds) *Buñuel siglo XXI*. Zaragoza: Prensas Universitarias de Zaragoza, pp. 21-28.
- Agnew, J.A. & Duncan, J.S. (1989) *The Power of Place: Bringing Together Geographical and Sociological Imaginations*. Winchester, Mass.: Unwin Hyman Inc.
- Almendros, N. (1985) *A Man With A Camera*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux.
- Altman, R. (1980a) 'Introduction', *Yale French Studies*, 60, pp. 3-15.
- (1980b) 'Moving Lips: Cinema as Ventriloquism', *Yale French Studies*, 60, pp. 67-79.
- Anderson, B. (1991) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Aranda, J. F. ed. (1972) *Nazarín*. New York, New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Aranda, J. F. (1975) *Luis Buñuel*. London: Secker and Warburg.
- Arriola, A. M. (2001) *Identidad y racismo en este fin de siglo*. Mexico City: Instituto de Antropología e Historia de México.
- Artaud, A. (1971) *Œuvres complètes d'Antonin Artaud*. Paris: Gallimard, Vol. IX.
- Ashby, J.C. (1967) *Organized Labor and the Mexican Revolution under Lázaro Cárdenas*. Chapel Hill: University of Carolina Press.
- Atl, Dr. (1934) *Una nueva perspectiva: la perspectiva curvilinear*. Mexico City: Editorial Cultura.
- Aumont, J. (1987) *Montage Eisenstein* (trans. Hildreth L., Penley C. & Ross A.). London: British Film Institute.
- Avellar, J.C. (2002) *Glauber Rocha*. Madrid: Catédra/Filmoteca Española.
- Babington, B. & Evans, P.W. (eds) (1985) *Blue Skies and Silver Linings, Aspects of the Hollywood Musical*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Barna, Y. (1973) *Eisenstein*. London: Secker and Warburg.
- Basu, D. (2004) 'Revolutionary Buñuel: A Marxist Perspective', in Santaolalla, I. (et al. eds) *Buñuel siglo XXI*. Zaragoza: Prensas Universitarias de Zaragoza pp. 31-41.

- Bartra, R. (2002) *Blood Ink and Culture, Miseries and Splendors of the Post-Mexican Condition* (trans. Hall, C.). Durham N.C.: Duke University Press.
- Bazin A. (1967) *What is Cinema?* Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Becker, M. (1995) *Setting the Virgin on Fire: Lazaro Cárdenas, Michoacán Peasants and the Redemption of the Mexican Revolution*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Beltrán, A. (ed.) (1996) *Gabriel Figueroa y la Pintura Mexicana*. Mexico City: INBA (catalogue Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Alvar y Carmen T. de Carillo Gil).
- Bennett, M. & Teague, D. (1999) *The Nature of Cities – Ecocriticism and Urban Environments*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Benjamin, T. (2000) *La Revolución: Mexico's Great Revolution as Memory, Myth and History*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Benjamin, T. & Wasserman, M. (eds) (1990) *Provinces of the Revolution: Essays on Regional Mexican History 1910-1929*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Bennett, D. & Sharpe, K. (1980) 'The State as Banker and Entrepreneur: The Last-Resort Character of the Mexican State's Economic Intervention 1917-76', *Comparative Politics*. 12, pp. 165-189.
- Berger, J. (1972) *Ways of Seeing*. London: Penguin.
- Bertaccini, T. (2001) *Ficción y realidad del héroe popular*. Mexico City: Universidad Iberoamericana.
- Beezley, W.H., E. Martin, C. & French, W.E., (eds) (1995) *Rituals of Rule, Rituals of Resistance: Public Celebrations and Popular Culture in Mexico*. Wilmington, Del.: SR Books.
- Beezley, W.H., & Meyer, M.C. (eds) (2000) *The Oxford History of Mexico*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bliss, K.E. (2001) *Compromised Positions, Prostitution, Public Health and Gender Politics in Revolutionary Mexico*. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Bonfil Batalla, G. (1996) *Mexico Profundo: Reclaiming a Civilization* (trans. Dennis, P.A.). Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bordwell, D., Staiger, J., & Thompson, K. (1985) *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

- (1995) 'Deep Focus Cinematography', in Staiger, J. (ed.) *The Studio System*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.
- Botting, F. (1996) *Gothic*. London: Routledge.
- Brading, D.A. (ed.) (1980) *Caudillo and Peasant in the Mexican Revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- (1988) 'Manuel Gamio and Official *Indigenismo* in Mexico', *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 7, pp: 75-89.
- (2001) *Mexican Phoenix: Our Lady of Guadalupe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Branston, G. (2000) *Cinema and Cultural Modernity*. Buckingham/Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Bridge, G. & Watson, S. (eds) (2002) *The Blackwell City Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Brown, B. (2002) *Cinematography, Theory and Practice, Image Making for Cinematographers, Directors and Videographers*. London: Focal Press.
- Bruno, G. (1997) 'Site-seeing: Architecture and the Moving Image', *Wide Angle*, 19 (4), pp. 8-24.
- Budd, M. (1976) 'The Home in the Wilderness: Visual Imagery in John Ford's Westerns', in Kitses, J., & Rickman, G. *The Western Reader*. New York: Limelight Editions, pp. 133-149.
- Buhler J. (2003) 'Panel Discussion on Film Sound/Film Music', *The Velvet Light Trap*, 51, pp. 73-91.
- Buñuel, L. (1984) *My Last Breath*. (trans. Abigail Israel). Reprint, London: Vintage, 1994.
- Burton-Carvajal, J. (1997) 'Mexican Melodramas of Patriarchy: Specificities of a Transcultural Form' in Stock, A.M. (ed.) *Framing Latin American Cinema: Contemporary Critical Directions*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press pp. 186-234.
- Buscombe, E. (1995) 'Notes on Columbia Pictures Corporation 1926-41, in Staiger, Janet (ed.) *The Studio System*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.
- (ed.) (1996) *The BFI Companion to the Western*. 2nd edn. London: British Film Institute.
- (1998) 'Inventing Monument Valley: Nineteenth Century Landscape Photography and the Western Film' in Kitses, J. & Rickmann, G. (eds) *The Western Reader*. New York: Limelight Editions, pp.115-130.

- Bush, C. (1996) 'Landscape', in Buscombe, E. (ed.) *The BFI Companion to the Western*. 2nd edn. London: British Film Institute, pp. 167-170.
- Bustamente, A.F. (1931) 'Las catáceas más hermosas del mundo', *El Universal Ilustrado*, 31 December, p.6.
- Cakoff, L. (1995) *Gabriel Figueroa: O mestre do olhar*. Sao Paulo: Sao Paulo International Film Festival special edition catalogue.
- Calder, J. (1974) *There Must be a Lone Ranger*. London: Hamish Hamilton.
- Camp, R.A. (1985) *Intellectuals and the State in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Mexico*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Campbell, B. (2003) *Mexican Murals in Times of Crisis*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Cardiff, J. (1996) *Magic Hour*. London: Faber.
- Carr, B. (1994) 'The Fate of the Vanguard under a Revolutionary State: Marxism's Contribution to the Construction of the Great Arch', in Gilbert, J., Rubenstein, A., & Zolov, E. (eds) *Fragments of a Golden Age*. Durham NC: Duke University Press, pp. 326-352.
- Carter, E., Donald, J. & Squires, J. (eds) (1993) *Space and Place: Theories of Identity and Location*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Caughie, J. (1991) *Theories of Authorship, A Reader*. London: Routledge.
- Charney, L. & Schwartz, V.R. (eds) (1995) *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Chion, M. (1982) *La Voix au Cinéma*. Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma, Editions de l'Etoile.
- Choucha, N. (1991) *Surrealism and the Occult*. Oxford: Mandrake.
- Clarke, C. (2000) *Class, Ethnicity and Community in Southern Mexico*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cockcroft, J.D. (1998) *Mexico's Hope: An Encounter with Politics and History*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Cohan, S. & Rae Hark, I. (1997) *The Road Movie Book*. London: Routledge.
- Coleman, K. M. & Davis, C. L. (1998) *Culture and Politics in Mexico*. Ann Arbor: Center for Political Studies, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan.



Comolli, J.L. (1977) 'Technique and Ideology: Camera, Perspective and Depth of Field', *Screen Reader*, 2, pp. 128-140.

Comolli, J.L. (1985) 'Technique and Ideology: Camera, Perspective and Depth of Field', in Nichols B. (ed.) *Movies and Methods Volume II*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 40-57.

Conn, R.T. (2002) *The Politics of Philology: Alfonso Reyes and the Invention of the Latin American Literary Tradition*. Lewisburg: Associated University Presses.

Coria, J.F. (1997) 'La flor y la hoja', *El Financiero Cultura*, 6 May, p. 52.

Cosgrove, D., & Daniels, S. (eds) (1988) *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cormack, M. (1994) *Ideology and Cinematography in Hollywood 1930-39*. London: MacMillan Press.

Corona, I., & Jorgensen, B.E. (2002) *The Contemporary Mexican Chronicle: Theoretical Perspectives on the Liminal Genre*. Albany, N.Y.: University of New York Press.

Craven, D. (2002) *Art and Revolution in Latin America 1910-1990*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Cuevas, J.L. (1988) 'Carta homenaje', *Artes de México*, 2, pp. 56-58.

da Vinci, L. (1906) *A Treatise on Painting* (trans. Rigaud, J.F.). London: George Bell and Sons.

Davis, D.E., (1994) *Urban Leviathan: Mexico City in the Twentieth Century*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

de la Colina, J., & Pérez Turrent, T. (1992) *Conversations with Luis Buñuel* (trans. by Paul Lenti). New York: Marsilio Publishers.

de los Reyes, A. (1987) *Medio siglo de cine mexicano*. Mexico City: Editorial Trillas.

de la Vega, A. E. (1995) 'Origins, Development and Crisis of the Sound Cinema (1929-64)', in Paranaguá, P.A. *Mexican Cinema*. London: British Film Institute, pp. 79-94.

—— (1999) 'The Decline of the Golden Age and the Making of the Crisis', in Hershfield, J., & Maciel, D.R. (eds) *Mexico's Cinema: A Century of Films and Filmmakers*. Wilmington, DE: S.R. Books, pp. 165-191.

de Orellana, M. (1988) 'Palabras sobre imágenes: el arte de Gabriel Figueroa' *Artes de México*, 2, pp. 37-53.

Dever, S. (2003) *Celluloid Nationalism and Other Melodramas: From Post-Revolutionary Mexico to fin de siglo Mexamérica*. New York: University of New York Press

Dey, T. (1992) 'Master Cinematographer', *American Cinematographer*, March, pp. 35-40.

—— (1995) 'ASC hails career of Gabriel Figueroa', *American Cinematographer*, March, pp. 40-48.

Donald, J. (1999) *Imagining the Modern City*. London: Athlone Press.

Doremus, A.T. (2001) *Culture, Politics and National Identity in Mexican Literature and Film (1929-1952)*. New York: P. Lang.

Dube, S. (2002) 'Enchantments of Modernity', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 4 (101), pp. 729-755.

Egan, L. (2001) *Carlos Monsiváis, Culture and Chronicle in Contemporary Mexico*. Tucson Arizona: University of Arizona Press.

Eisenstein, S. (1970) *Notes of a Film Director* (trans. Danko, X.). New York: Dover.

—— (1985a) *Immoral Memories* (trans. Marshall, H.). London: Peter Owen.

—— (1985b) *Nonindifferent Nature* (trans. Herbert Marshall). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Espinasa, J. M. (1990) 'Olvidar el cine', *Artes de Mexico*, 10, pp. 51-53.

Evans, P.W. (1995) *The Films of Luis Buñuel – Subjectivity and Desire*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Evans P.W. & Santaolalla, I. (eds) (2003) *Luis Buñuel: New Readings*. London: British Film Institute.

Faber, S. (2002) *Exile and Cultural Hegemony, Spanish Intellectuals in Mexico (1939-1975)*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.

Feder, E. (1996) 'A Reckoning - Interview with Gabriel Figueroa', *Film Quarterly*, 49 (3), pp. 2-14.

Federal Bureau of Investigation. File no 100-368518: Memorandum 4-26-67 Ref: (105-3040) Re Mex letter to Bureau 3.6.67.

—— File no 100-368518: Memorandum from the legal attaché at the Embassy in Mexico City to the director of the FBI, 10.3.50.

—— File no 100-368518: Memorandum from Wallace Clarke to the Ambassador, 9.3.50.

Fein, S. (1998a) 'Transnationalization and Cultural Collaboration: Mexican Film Propaganda during World War II', *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* 17, pp. 79-104.

—— (1998b) 'Everyday Forms of Transnational Collaboration: U.S. Film Propaganda in Cold War Mexico', in Joseph, G., Legrand, C. & Salvatore, R.D. (eds) *Close Encounters of Empire – Writing the Cultural History of US-Latin American Relations*. Durham NC: Duke University Press, pp. 400-450.

—— (1999) 'From Collaboration to Containment: Hollywood and the International Political Economy of Mexican Cinema after the Second World War', in Herschfield J., & Maciel, D. (eds) *Mexico's Cinema: A Century of Films and Filmmakers*. Wilmington, De: Scholarly Resources, pp. 123-64.

—— (2000) 'Transculturated Anticommunism, Cold War Hollywood in Postwar Mexico', in Noriega, C. A. (ed.) *Visible Nations, Film and Video in Latin America*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 82-111.

—— (2001) 'Myths of Cultural Imperialism and Nationalism in Golden Age Mexican Cinema', in Joseph, G., Rubenstein A. & Zolov, E. (eds) *Fragments of a Golden Age: The Politics of Culture in Mexico 1940-2000*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, pp. 159-198.

—— (2003) 'Culture across Borders in the Americas', *History Compass*, 1 (1) August 2003 [Online]. Available at: <http://www.Blackwell-compass.com/subject/history> (Accessed: 3 April, 2006).

Fernández, J. (1959) *El retablo de los reyes: estética del arte de la Nueva España*. Mexico DF: Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

Fernández Campo, F. (1987) *Identidad nacional, lo que realmente somos, en defensa del mexicano, el eje de la mexicanidad*. Mexico City: Alethia.

Feuer, J. (1993) *The Hollywood Musical*. 2nd edn. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Figueroa, G. (1962) 'La agonía del cine', *Siempre*, March, p. 10.

—— (1975) 'Interview with Gabriel Figueroa', *American Cinematographer*, February, p. 216.

—— (1988) *Autobiography*. Typed manuscript, Mexico City: Gabriel Figueroa Flores collection.

—— (1995) 'Los discursos de Gabriel Figueroa ante la Sociedad de Fotógrafos de Cine de Estados Unidos' *Proceso*, 958 (60), 13 March, p. 60.

Figueroa Flores, G. (2002) Interviewed by Ceri Higgins [Audio cassette and digital video], 29 March and 3 April.

Florescano E. (1994) *Memory, Myth and Time in Mexico: From the Aztecs to Independence* (trans. Bork, A.G.). Austin: University of Texas Press.

Florescano, E. & Pérez Montfort, R. (eds) (1995) *Historiadores de México en el siglo XX*. Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes.

Folgarait, L. (1998) *Mural Painting and Social Revolution in Mexico 1920-1940: Art of the New Order*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Foucault, M. (1972) *Espace et politique*. Reprint, Paris: Anthropos, 2000.

—— (1980) 'Questions on Geography' in Gordon, C. (ed.) *Power/Knowledge, Selected Interviews and other Writings 1972*. Brighton: Harvesters Wheatsheaf, pp. 63-77.

Franco, J. (1989) *Plotting Women, Gender and Representation in Mexico*. New York: Columbia University Press.

—— (2004) 'The Return of Coatlicue: Mexican Nationalism and the Aztec Past', *The Journal for Latin American Cultural Studies*, 13, 2, pp. 205-219.

Fuentes, C. (1958) *La región más transparente*. Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

—— (1988) 'Una Flor Carnívora', *Artes de México*, 2, pp. 27-35.

—— (1996) *A New Time for Mexico*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux.

Fuentes, V. (2004) 'The Constant of Exile in Buñuel' in Evans P.W. & Santaolalla, I. (eds), *Luis Buñuel: New Readings*. London: British Film Institute, pp. 159-172.

Gabriel Figueroa (1997) Radio Educación UNAM, 12 May.

Galindo Ulloa, J. (1997) 'El hombre tras la cámara', *La Jornada Semanal*, 25 May, pp.2-3.

García, G. (1995) 'Melodrama: The Passion Machine' (trans. López, A.M.) in . Paranagúa, P.A., *Mexican Cinema*. London: BFI, pp. 153-162.

García Riera, E. (1987) *México visto por el cine extranjero*. Vols 1-6. Mexico City: Ediciones Era & Guadalajara: Centro de Investigaciones y Enseñanzas Cinematográficas.

—— (1992a) *Historia documental del cine mexicano (1929-1937)*. 2nd edn. Guadalajara: Centro de Investigaciones y Enseñanzas Cinematográficas.

- (1992b) *Historia documental del cine mexicano (1938-1942)*. 2nd edn. Guadalajara: Centro de Investigaciones y Enseñanzas Cinematográficas.
- (1992c) *Historia documental del cine mexicano (1943-1945)*. 2nd edn. Guadalajara: Centro de Investigaciones y Enseñanzas Cinematográficas.
- (1992d) *Historia documental del cine mexicano (1961-1963)*, 2nd edn. Guadalajara: Centro de Investigaciones y Enseñanzas Cinematográficas.
- (1992e) *Historia documental del cine mexicano (1959-1961)*, 2nd edn. Guadalajara: Centro de Investigaciones y Enseñanzas Cinematográficas.
- (1998) *Breve Historia del cine mexicano 1897-1997*. Mexico City: Ediciones MAPA/IMCINE.
- Garside, P. (ed.) (1984) *The Visionary: Walter Scott*. Cardiff: University College Cardiff Press.
- Gerzso, G. (1991) Interviewed by Ceri Higgins [Audio cassette] 9 September.
- Gilbert, J. M., Legrand, C. C. & Salvatore, R.C. (eds) (1998) *Close Encounters of Empire, Writing the Cultural History of US-Latin American Relations*. Durham NC: Duke University Press.
- Gilbert, J.M., Rubenstein, A. & Zolov, E. (eds) (2001) *Fragments of a Golden Age*. Durham NC: Duke University Press.
- Gilly, A. (1997) *Chiapas: la razón ardiente: ensayo sobre la rebelión del mundo encantado*. Mexico City: Ediciones Era.
- Gledhill, C. (ed.) (1987) *Home Is Where The Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*. London: BFI
- Gledhill, C. Williams, L. (eds) (2000) *Reinventing Film Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Goldstein, L. (1988) *The Social and Cultural Roots of Linear Perspective*. Minneapolis MN: MEP Publications.
- González Sánchez, J.A. (1994) *Más (+) cultura(s), ensayos sobre realidades plurals*. Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes.
- Gorbman, C. (1987) *Unheard Melodies*. London: British Film Institute.
- Gramsci, A. (1971) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Greenhalgh, C. (2003) 'Shooting from the Heart – Cinematographers and their Medium', in Sears, R. & Pocknell, D. (eds) *Making Pictures: A Century of European Cinematography*. London: Aurum Press, pp. 94-155.

- Gubern, R. (1976) *Cine español en el exilio (1936-1939)*. Barcelona: Editorial Lumen.
- Hamilton, N. (1982) 'The State and the National Bourgeoisie in Postrevolutionary Mexico: 1920-1940', *Latin American Perspectives*, 9, (4), pp. 31-54.
- Hammond, P. (1978) *The Shadow and Its Shadow: Surrealist Writings on Cinema*. Reprint, Edinburgh: Polygon, 1991.
- Hansen, M.B. (2000) 'The Mass Production of the Sense: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism', in Gledhill, C. & Williams, L. (eds) *Reinventing Film Studies*. London: Arnold.
- Hart, S. (2005) 'Buñuel's Box of Subaltern Tricks', in Evans, P.W. & Santaolalla, I. (eds) (2004) *Luis Buñuel: New Readings*. London: British Film Institute, pp. 65-79.
- Hayden, T. (2002) *The Zapatista Reader*. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press/Nation Books.
- Hayes, J.E. (2000) *Radio Nation: Communication, Popular Culture and Nationalism in Mexico (1920-1950)*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Heath, S. (1986) 'Narrative Space' in Rosen, P. (ed.) *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 379-420.
- Henderson, B. (1976) 'Towards a non-bourgeois camera style', in Nichols, B., *Movies and Methods*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 422-438.
- Hernández Rodríguez, R. (1999) 'Melodrama and Social Comedy in the Cinema of the Golden Age' in Hershfield, J. & Maciel, D.R. (eds) *Mexico's Cinema, A Century of Film and Filmmakers*. Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, pp. 101-121.
- Hershfield, J. (1996) *Mexican Cinema/Mexican Woman 1940-1950*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Hershfield, J. & Maciel, D.R. (eds) (1999) *Mexico's Cinema, A Century of Film and Filmmakers*. Wilmington: Scholarly Resources.
- Higgins, C. (2004) 'Exterminating Visions: The Collaboration of Gabriel Figueroa and Luis Buñuel', in Santaolalla, I. (et al. eds) *Buñuel siglo XXI*. Zaragoza: Prensas Universitarias de Zaragoza, pp. 213-220.
- Higson, A. & Maltby R. (eds) (1999) *"Film Europe" and "Film America" Cinema, Commerce and Cultural Exchange 1920-1939*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press.
- Hirschman, J. (ed.) (1965) *Anthology, Antonin Artaud*. San Francisco: City Lights Books.

- Hogle, J.E. (ed.) (2002) *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Holmes Guiteras, C., (1961) *Perils of the Soul: The World View of the Tzotzil Indian*. New York: Free Press of Glencoe.
- Homenaje a Gabriel Figueroa* (1997) Channel 22, 27 April.
- Huacuja del Toro, M. (1997) 'Gabriel Figueroa', *El Financiero*, 13 May, p.31.
- Ingram, D. (2004) *Green Screen: Environmentalism and Hollywood Cinema*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press.
- Issac, A. (1993) *Conversaciones con Gabriel Figueroa*. Guadalajara: Universidad de Guadalajara.
- Ishii-Gonzalès, S. (2004) 'Wuthering Heights: Buñuel, Bataille, Bronte', in Santaolalla, I., (et al. eds) *Buñuel siglo XXI*. Zaragoza: Prensas Universitarias de Zaragoza pp. 239-246.
- Joseph, G. M. & Rubenstein, A. (eds) (2001) *Fragments of a Golden Age, The Politics of Culture in Mexico Since 1940*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Joseph, G. M. & Henderson, T. J. (eds) (2002) *The Mexico Reader: History, Culture, Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Joseph, G. M. (ed.) (1994) *Everyday Forms of State Formation, Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Kalinak, K. (1992) *Settling the Score: Music and the Classical Hollywood Film*. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Karetinikova, I. (1991) *Mexico According to Eisenstein*. Albuquerque: New Mexico Press.
- Katz, F. (1988) (ed.) *Riot, Rebellion and Revolution: Rural Social Conflict in Mexico*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kassabian A. 'Panel Discussion on Film Sound/Film Music', *The Velvet Light Trap*, 51, pp. 73-91.
- Kinder, M. (1993) *Blood Cinema, The Reconstruction of National Identity in Spain*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- King, J., López, A. & Alvarado, M. (eds) (1993) *Mediating Two Worlds, Cinematic Encounters in the Americas*. London: British Film Institute.
- King, J. (1990) *Magical Reels: a History of Cinema in Latin America*. London: Verso.

Kitses, J., & Rickman, G. (eds) (1998) *The Western Reader*. New York: Limelight Editions.

Klinger, B. (1997) 'The Road to Dystopia, Landscaping the Nation in Easy Rider', in Cohan, S. & Hark, I. R., *The Road Movie Book*. London: Routledge, pp. 179-203.

Knight, A. (1986) *The Mexican Revolution Volume 2: Counter-Revolution and Reconstruction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

—— (1990) 'Racism, Revolution and Indigenismo: Mexico 1930-1940' in Graham, R. (ed.) *The Idea of Race in Latin America 1870-1940*. Austin: University of Texas Press, pp. 72-73.

—— (1992) 'The Peculiarities of Mexican History: Mexico Compared to Latin America 1821-1992', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 24, Quincentenary Supplement, pp. 99-144.

—— (1994a) 'Popular Culture and the Revolutionary State in Mexico 1910-1940', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 74 (3), pp. 393-444.

—— (1994b) 'Cárdenismo: Juggernaut or Jalopy?', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 26 (1), pp. 73-107.

Kracauer, S. (1995) *The Mass Ornament*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Kristeva, J. (1991) *Strangers to Ourselves* (trans. Roudiez, L.S.). New York: Columbia University Press.

Kubler, G. (1965) *Mexican Architecture in the Sixteenth Century*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Lafaye, J. (1976) *Quetzalcoátl and Guadalupe: The Formation of Mexican National Consciousness*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

*La suerte de vivir*, Gabriel Figueroa (1997) Channel 40, 3 May.

Laszlo, A. (2000) *Every Frame a Rembrandt*. Boston: Focal Press.

Lee, A.W. (1999) *Painting on the Left: Diego Rivera, Radical Politics and San Francisco's Public Murals*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Lefebvre, H. (1991) *The Production of Space* (trans. Nicholson-Smith, D.). Oxford: Blackwell.

Lefebvre, H., Kifman, E. & Lebas, E. (eds) (1996) *Writings on Cities*. Oxford: Blackwell.



- LeGates, R.T. & Stout, F. (2000) *The City Reader*. 2nd edn. London: Routledge.
- Lesser, J. (1991) 'Tisse's Unfinished Treasure: ¡Qué viva México!', *American Cinematographer*, July.
- Levin Rojo, E. (1996) 'Detener la imagen' in Beltrán Alejandro (ed.) *Gabriel Figueroa y la Pintura Mexicana*. Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (catalogue Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Alvar y Carmen T de Carillo Gil) pp. 17-27.
- Limon, J.E. (1998) *American Encounters, Greater Mexico, The United States and the Erotics of Culture*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Lomnitz Adler, C. (1992) *Exits from the Labyrinth, Culture and Ideology in the Mexican National Space*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- (2001) *Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico: An Anthropology of Nationalism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- López, A. (1991) 'Celluloid Tears: Melodrama in the "Old" Mexican Cinema', *Iris*, 13 (Summer) pp. 29-51.
- (1995) 'Tears and Desire: Melodrama in the "Old" Mexican Cinema' in King, J., López, A. & Alvarado, M. (eds) *Mediating Two Worlds: Cinematic Encounters in the Americas*. London: BFI, pp. 147-163.
- (1999) 'Facing up to Hollywood', in Gledhill, C. & Williams, L. (eds) *Reinventing Film Studies*. London: Arnold, pp. 419-437.
- (2000) 'Early Cinema and Modernity in Latin America', *Cinema Journal*, 40 (1) pp. 48-78.
- Lowe, S. (1995) *Tina Modotti, Photographs*. New York: Harry N. Abrams inc.
- Maltby, R. (2003) *Hollywood Cinema*. 2nd edn. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Maltin, L. (1978) *The Art of the Cinematographer*. New York: Dover.
- Markman, E. (2000) *The History of Gothic Fiction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Marshall, B. & Stilwell R. (eds.) (2000) *Musical Hollywood and Beyond*. Exeter: Intellect Books.
- Massey, D. (1994) *Space, Place and Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- (2005) *For Space*. London: Sage.
- Mast, G. (1984) 'On Framing', *Critical Inquiry*, 11 (1) pp. 82-109.

Matless, D. (1998) *Landscape and Englishness*. London: Reaktion.

Matos Moctezuma, E. (2002) 'The Templo Mayor, The Great Temple of the Aztecs' in *Aztecs*. Catalogue to accompany Royal Academy of Arts exhibition, 'Aztecs', London: Royal Academy of Arts. November 2002-April 2003.

Metz, C. (1982) *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* (trans. by Britton, C., Williams, A., Brewster, B. & Guzzetti, A.) Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Meyer, E. (1976) *Cuadernos de la Cineteca: testimonios para la historia de cinema mexicano*. Mexico City: Secretaria de Educación Pública.

Meyer, L. (1976) 'El primer tramo del camino and la encrucijada', in Cosío Villegas, D. (ed.) *Historia General de México 2*. Mexico DF: El Colegio de México, pp. 1273-1356.

Mignolo, W.D. (2002) 'The Enduring Enchantment', in *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 4 (101), pp. 927-954.

Mitchell, W.J.T. (1994) *Imperial Landscape: Landscape and Power*. Chicago: University of Chicago.

Monsiváis, C. (1988) 'Gabriel Figueroa: La institución del punto de vista', *Artes de México*, 2, Autumn, pp. 62-70.

—— (1993) *Gabriel Figueroa, la mirada en el centro*. Mexico City: Miguel Angel Porrúa.

—— (1997a) *Mexican Postcards* (trans. Kraniauska, J.). London: Verso.

—— (1997b) 'Camarógrafo del Indio Fernández', *La Jornada*. 24 April, pp. 9-12.

—— (2002) *Escenas de pudor y liviandad*. Mexico: Grijalbo Mondadori.

Mora, C.J. (1989) *Mexican Cinema, Reflections of a Society 1896-1988*. 2nd edn. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Mraz, J. (2001) 'Today, Tomorrow and Always: The Golden Age of Illustrated Magazines in Mexico 1937-1960', in Joseph, G.M., Rubinstein, A. & Zolov, E. *Fragments of A Golden Age*. Durham NC: Duke University Press.

Nájera Ramírez, O. (1994) 'Engendering Nationalism: Identity, Discourse and the Mexican Charro', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 67 (1), pp. 1-14.

Neale, S. (1985) *Cinema and Technology, Image, Sound, Colour*. London: British Film Institute.

Nelson Miller, M. (1998) *Red, White, and Green: The Maturing of Mexicanidad 1940-1946*. El Paso: Western Press, University of Texas.

- Niblo, S. R. (1999) *Mexico in the 1940s Modernity, Politics, and Corruption*. Wilmington: Scholarly Resources.
- Nichols, B. (1981) *Ideology and the Image: Social Representation in the Cinema and Other Media*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Nizhny, V. (1969) *Lessons with Eisenstein* (trans. Montagu, I. & Leyda, J.). New York: Hill and Wang.
- Noble, A. (2005) *Mexican National Cinema*. London: Routledge
- Noriega, C.A. & Ricci S. (eds) (1994) *The Mexican Cinema Project*. Los Angeles: University of California Archive.
- Noriega, C. A. (2000) *Visible Nations, Film and Video in Latin America*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Nugent, D. (ed.) (1998) *Rural Revolt in Mexico, US Intervention and the Domain of Subaltern Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Nykvist, S. (2003) 'The Director of Photography', in Sears, R. & Pocknell, D. (eds) *Making Pictures: A Century of European Cinematography*. London: Aurum Press.
- Ogle, P. (1971) 'Deep Focus Cinematography, A Technological/Aesthetic History', *Filmmakers Newsletter*, May.
- Ono, I. (1996) *Divine Excess: Mexican Ultra-Baroque*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books.
- Oriol, A, & Vargas, A. (1993) *El mexicano, raíces de la mexicanidad*. Mexico City: Instituto Politécnico Nacional.
- Orr, J. (1993) *Cinema and Modernity*. Oxford: Polity Press.
- Oyarzún, K. (1991) *Bordering Difference, Culture and Ideology in 20th Century Mexico*. Riverside, California: University of California Press.
- Paranaguá, P. (ed.) (1995) *Mexican Cinema* (trans. López, A.). London: British Film Institute.
- Paz, O. (1950) *El laberinto de la soledad*. Reprint, Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1988.
- (1961) *The Labyrinth of Solitude: Life and Thought in Mexico*. (trans. Kemp, L.). Reprint, London: Penguin Books, 1990.
- (1990) 'Introduction', in O'Neill, J.P. & Howard, K. (eds) *Mexico: Splendors of Thirty Centuries*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art & Bullfinch Press.

- Pedretti, C. (1965) *Leonardo da Vinci on Painting a Lost Book (Libro A) Re-assembled from the Codex Vaticanus urbinas 1270 and from the Codex Leicester*. London: Peter Owen.
- Percheron, D. & Butzel, M. (1980) 'Sound Image and its Relation to Image and Diegesis', *Yale French Studies*, 60, pp. 16-23.
- Peguero, R. (1997) 'La cámara de un melómano tremebundo', *La Jornada*. 24 April, pp. 1-5.
- Pérez Montfort, R. & Güemes, L.O. (1982) *Por la patria y por la raza, tres movimientos nacionalistas 1930-1940*. Mexico: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social.
- Pérez Montfort, R. (1990) *Breve antología de documentos hispanistas (1931-1948)*. México City: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social.
- (1993) *Por la patria y por la raza la derecha secular en el sexenio de Lázaro Cárdenas*. Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras.
- (1994) *Estampas de nacionalismo popular mexicano: ensayos sobre cultura popular y nacionalismo*. Mexico City: Ciesas.
- Pérez Turrent, T. (1997a) 'In Memoriam Gabriel Figueroa (1907-1997)', *El Universal: Espectáculos*, 2 May, p. 1.
- (1997b) 'Un Pacto con la luz' *Siempre!* 24<sup>th</sup> May, p. 68.
- (1995) 'Crisis and Renovations (1965-91)' in Paranagua, P. (ed.) *Mexican Cinema* (trans. López, A.). London: British Film Institute, pp. 94-115.
- Perezcano de Jiménez Arrillaga, J. (1978) *México y la Mexicanidad nacimiento de una nacionalidad*. Mexico City: Ediciones Botas.
- Petrie, D. (1996) *The British Cinematographer*. London: British Film Institute.
- Phillips, A. (1999) 'Performing Paris: Myths of the city in Robert Siodmak's émigré musical *La Vie Parisienne*', *Screen*, 40 (3), pp. 257-276.
- (2004) *City of Darkness, City of Light: Immigrant Filmmakers in Paris 1929-1939*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Pick, Z. (1993) *The New Latin American Cinema: A Continental Project*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

- Pidduck, J. (1998) 'Of Windows and Country Walks: Frames of Space and Movement in 1990s Austen Adaptations', *Screen*, 39 (4), pp. 381-400.
- Pierce, D. (2004) *At the Crossroads in Painting A New World – Mexican Art and Life 1521-1821*. Texas: University of Texas Press.
- Pile, S. (1996) *The Body and the City*. London: Routledge.
- Pineda, A. & Paranaguá, P.A. (1995) 'Mexico and its Cinema', in Paranagua, P. (ed.) *Mexican Cinema* (trans. López, A.). London: British Film Institute, pp. 15-62.
- Poniatowska, E. (1996) *La mirada que limpia*. Mexico City: Editorial Diana.
- Pratt, M.L. (1992) *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Punter, D. (ed.) (2000) *A Companion to the Gothic*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Rainsberger, T. (1981) *James Wong Howe, Cinematographer*. London: Tantivy Press.
- Ramírez Berg, C. (1992) 'Figuerola's Skies and Oblique Perspective – Notes on the Development of the Classical Mexican Style', *Spectator*, 13 (2), pp. 24-41.
- (1994) 'The Cinematic Invention of Mexico the Poetics and Politics of the Fernández-Figueroa Style', in Noriega, Chon A. & Ricci S. (eds) *The Mexican Cinema Project*. Los Angeles: UCLA archive, pp. 13-24.
- (1992) *Cinema of Solitude – A Critical Study of Mexican Film 1967-1983*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- (2002) *Latino Images in Film: Stereotypes, Subversion, and Resistance*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Ramírez Berg, C. & Agrasánchez Jr, R. (2001) *Carteles de la época de oro del cine mexicano/Poster Art from the Golden Age of Mexican Cinema*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Ramos, S. (1962) *Man and Culture in Mexico* (trans. Earle, E.). New York: McGraw Hill.
- Regan, M.L. (1990) *La raza: Mexican worldview*. Dayton, Ohio: W.S.U. Printing Service.
- Revueltas, J. (1947) 'Lugar del cine en el arte', *Anthropos*, 1, Mexico City: Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia y el Centro de Estudios Circuncaribes.

- Reyes, A. (1923) *Visión de Anahuac*. Reprint, Mexico City: Colegio de México, 1953.
- Rivera, H.J. (1995) 'Recibió "el mayor premio de mi vida" el de la Sociedad Americana de Cinefotógrafos', *Proceso*, 958 (60), 13 March, pp. 61-64.
- Rochfort, D. (1987) *The Murals of Diego Rivera*. London: Journeyman Press.
- Rochfort, D. (1993) *Mexican Muralists Orozco, Rivera, Siqueiros*. London: Laurence King Publishers.
- Rose, G. (1993) *Feminism and Geography: the Limits of Geographical Knowledge*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Rosen, P. (ed.) (1986) *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Rostas, S.E. (1997) 'Mexicanidad: the Resurgence of the Indian in Popular Mexican Nationalism', *Latin American Studies Association Conference*. Guadalajara, Mexico, 17-18 April 1997.
- Rubenstein, A. (1998) *Bad language, Naked Ladies, and other Threats to the Nation: A Political History of Comic Books in Mexico*. Durham N.C: Duke University Press.
- Ruiz, B. (1997) 'Contraluz: Adiós a Figueroa', *Reforma*, 2 May, p. 23.
- Ruy Sánchez, A. (ed.) (1988) 'El Arte de Gabriel Figueroa', Reprint, *Artes de Mexico*, 2, Autumn, 1992.
- Said, E.W. (1993) *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Chatto and Windus.
- (2001) *Reflections on Exile and other Literary and Cultural essays*. London: Granta.
- Salt, B. (1976a) 'Film Style and Technology in the 1930s', *Film Quarterly* XXX (1), pp. 19-32.
- (1976b) Letter to *Screen*, 17 (1), Spring.
- (1992) *Film Style and Technology History and Analysis*. 2nd edn. London: Starword.
- Sandro, P. (1987) *Diversions of Pleasure: Luis Buñuel and the Crises of Desire*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.
- Santaolalla, I., (et al. eds) (2004) *Buñuel siglo XXI*. Zaragoza: Prensas Universitarias de Zaragoza.
- Savage, C. (1999) Interviewed by Ceri Higgins [Audio cassette] 23 September.

- Sears, R. & Pocknell, D. (eds) (2003) *Making Pictures: A Century of European Cinematography*. London: Aurum Press.
- Segre, E. (2001) 'Reframing the City: Images of Displacement in Mexican Urban Films of the 1940s and 1950s', *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, 10 (2), pp. 205-222.
- Seton, M. (1978) *Sergei M. Eisenstein - A Biography*. London: Dennis Dobson.
- Schaefer, C. (1996) *Danger Zones, Homosexuality, National Identity, and Mexican Culture*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Schama, S. (1996) *Landscape and Memory*. London: Fontana Press.
- Schoemann, G. (1999) Interviewed by Ceri Higgins [Audio cassette] 7 September.
- Schuessler, M. (1995) 'Gabriel Figueroa, fotógrafo, la suerte me acompaña', in *Siempre*, 10 August, pp. 74-75.
- Serra Rojas, A. (1994) *Mexicanidad, Proyección de la nación mexicana hacia el siglo XXI*. Mexico City: Porrúa.
- Shohat, E. & Stam, R. (1994) *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*. London: Routledge.
- Sider, L., Freeman, D. & Sider, J. (eds) (2003) *Soundscape: The School of Sound Lectures 1998-2001*. London: Wallflower Press.
- Sluyter, A. (2002) *Colonialism and Landscape: Postcolonial Theory and Application*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Inc.
- Sobchack, V.C. (1979) 'The Grapes of Wrath (1940): Thematic Emphasis Through Visual Style', *American Quarterly*, 31 (5), pp. 596-615.
- Soja, E.W. (1989) *Postmodern Geographies: the Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*. London: Verso.
- (1996) *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-And-Imagined Places*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- (2000) *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Soler Frost, J. (ed.) (2005) *Gabriel Figueroa, Memorias*. Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma de México.
- Spottiswoode, R. (1966) *Film and its Techniques*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

- Staiger, J. (ed.) (1995) *The Studio System*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.
- Stangos, N. (ed.) (1981) *Concepts of Modern Art*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Stevens, D. (2000) *The Gothic Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stevenson, M. (2004) 'The Conversation Between Brecht and Buñuel: On Contradiction in Gestic Acting', in Santaolalla, I., (et al. eds) (2004) *Buñuel siglo XXI*. Zaragoza: Prensas Universitarias de Zaragoza, pp. 513-521
- Stilwell, R. (2003) 'Panel Discussion on Film Sound/Film Music', *The Velvet Light Trap*, 51, pp. 73-91.
- Stock, A.M. (1997) *Framing Latin American Cinema: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Story, D. (1985) 'Policy Cycles in Mexican Presidential Politics', *Latin American Research Review*, 20 (3), pp. 139-161.
- Sturman, J. (2000) *Spanish Operetta, American Stage*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Swain, M. (1995) *Surrealism in Exile and the Beginning of the New York School*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Swallow, N. (1976) *Eisenstein: A Documentary Portrait*. London: George Allen and Unwin.
- Taibo II, P. (1986) *El Indio Fernández: Por Mis Pistolas*. Mexico DF: Editorial Joaquín Mortiz, S.A.
- Thom, R. (2003) 'Designing a Movie for Sound', in Sider, L., Freeman, D. & Sider, J. (eds) *Soundscape: The School of Sound Lectures 1998-2001*. London: Wallflower Press, pp. 120-125.
- Thomas, D. (2000) *Beyond Genre: Melodrama, Comedy and Romance in Hollywood Films*. Edinburgh: Moffat, Cameron & Hollis.
- Thompson, K. (1980) 'Early Sound Counterpoint', *Yale French Studies*, 60, pp. 115-140.
- Thoyer, F. (2001) 'Gabriel Figueroa, le plus grand chef opérateur mexicain', *Positif*, 471, May, pp. 95-101.
- Tibol, R. (1964) *Historia General del Arte Mexicano Época Moderna y Contemporánea*. Mexico DF: Editorial Hermes S.A.
- Toland, G. (1941) 'Realism for Citizen Kane', *American Cinematographer*, February, pp. 54-55.



—— (1947) Letter to Gabriel Figueroa, 25 May. Mexico City: Private collection of Gabriel Figueroa Flores.

Tovar y Teresa, G. (1988) *Un rescate de la fantasía: el arte de los Lagarto, iluminadores novohispanos de los siglos XVI y XVII*. Mexico DF: El Equilibrista.

Truett, S., & Young, E. (eds) (2004) *Continental Crossroads: Remapping U.S.-Mexico Borderlands History*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Tuñón, J. (1988) *En su propio espejo – entrevista con Emilio 'el indio' Fernández*. Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma/Iztapalapa Metropolitana.

van Delden, M. (1998) *Carlos Fuentes, Mexico and Modernity*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Vaughan, M.K. (1999) 'Cultural approaches to Peasant Politics in the Mexican Revolution', *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, 79 (2), pp. 269-305.

—— (2001) 'Transnational Processes and the Rise and Fall of the Mexican State: Notes from the Past', in Joseph, G., Rubenstein, A. & Zolov, E. (eds) *Fragments of a Golden Age: The Politics of Culture in Mexico since 1940*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Vázquez Mantecón, A. (1996) 'Los tres grandes eran cuatro...' in Beltrán, A. *Gabriel Figueroa y la Pintura Mexicana*. Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes. Catalogue for exhibition in the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Alvar y Carmen T. de Carillo Gil, pp. 29-38.

Wasserman, M. (1987) 'Strategies for Survival of the Porfirian Elite in Revolutionary Mexico: Chihuahua during the 1920s', *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, 67 (1), pp. 87-107.

Webber, C. (2003) *The Zarzuela Companion*. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press.

Werner, M.S. (1997) *Encyclopedia of Mexico: History, Society & Culture*. Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers.

Weis, E. & Belton J. (eds) (1985) *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Weiss, T. (1992) *On The Margins: The Art of Exile in VS Naipaul*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

Weston, E. (1961) *The Daybooks of Edward Weston, Volume 1: Mexico*. New York: Aperture.

White, A. (1982) 'Figueroa in a Landscape', *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 10 (1), pp. 60-62.

- White, J. (1987) *The Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Williams, A. (1995) *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Williams, C. (2000) 'After the Classic, the Classical and Ideology: the Differences of Realism' in Gledhill, C. Williams, L. (2000) *Reinventing Film Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 206-220.
- Williams, L. (1981) *Figures of Desire: A Theory and Analysis of Surrealist Film*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Winston, B. (1996) *Technologies of Seeing: Photography, Cinematography and Television*. London: British Film Institute.
- Wong Howe, J. (1945) 'James Wong Howe Replies to Comment on Cameramen', *American Cinematographer*, December, p. 419.
- Wood, M. (1993) 'Buñuel in Mexico', in King, J., López, A. & Alvarado M., (eds) *Mediating Two Worlds, Cinematic Encounters in the Americas*. London: British Film Institute, pp. 44-51.
- Yeoh, B., Charney, M.W. & Kiong, T.C. (eds) (2003) *Approaching Transnationalisms, Studies on Transnational Societies, Multicultural contacts and Imaginings of Home*. Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Zea, L. (1983) *From Mexicanidad to a Philosophy of History*. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

Websites consulted:

<http://www.cinematographer.com/ascP.htm> (Accessed 5 May, 2001)

<http://www.museum.tv/archives/etv/A/htmlA/azcarragaem/azcarragaem.htm>  
(Accessed 22 February, 2005)

<http://www.ketupa.net/televisa2.htm> (Accessed 22 February, 2005)

<http://www.cinematographer.com> (Accessed between 30 January 2003 – 30 June 2006)

## Gabriel Figueroa Filmography

As stills photographer:

1932      *Revolución*  
Dir: Miguel Contreras Torres  
(Miguel Contreras Torres)

1933      *Almas encontradas*  
Dir: Raphael J Sevilla  
(Industrial Cinematográfica)

*Sagrario*  
Dir: Ramón Peón  
(Aspa Films de México)

*La mujer del puerto*  
Dir: Arcady Boytler  
(Eurinda Films)

*La noche del pecado*  
Dir: Miguel Contreras Torres  
(Miguel Contreras Torres)

*La sangre manda*  
Dir: José Bohr/Raphael J Sevilla  
(Producciones Cinematográficas Internacionales)

*Enemigos*  
Dir: Chana Ureta  
(Atlántida Films)

1934        *Chucho el roto*  
Dir: Gabriel Soria  
(Cinematográfica Mexicana)

*Corazón bandolero*  
Dir: Raphael J Sevilla  
(México Films)

*Tribu*  
Dir: Miguel Contreras Torres  
(Miguel Contreras Torres)

As lighting engineer:

1933        *El escándalo*  
Dir: Chano Ureta  
(Ren-Mex)

1934        *El primo Basilio*  
Dir: Carlos de Nájera  
(Eurinda Films)

As second camera:

1933        *Viva Villa!*  
Dir: Howard Hawks  
(Metro Goldwyn Meyer)

As camera operator:

1935        *Vámonos con Pancho Villa*  
Dir: Fernando de Fuentes  
(CLASA Films)

*María Elena*

Dir: Raphael J Sevilla

(Impulsora Mex-Art)

1936

*Las mujeres mandan*

Dir: Fernando de Fuentes

(CLASA Films)

*Cielito lindo*

Roberto O'Quigley

(José Luis Bueno)

As associate director of photography:

1947

*Tarzan and the Mermaids (Tarzán y las sirenas)*

Dir: Robert Florey

(Figueroa with Jack Draper)

(RKO Radio Pictures)

As director of photography:

1936

*Allá en el Rancho Grande*

Dir: Fernando de Fuentes

(Alfonso Rivas Bustamente and Fernando de Fuentes)

1937

*Bajo el cielo de México*

Dir: Fernando de Fuentes

(Compañía Mexicana de Películas)

*Jalisco nunca pierde*

Dir: Chano Urueta

(Producciones Sánchez Tello)

*Canción del alma*

Dir: Chano Urueta

(Compañía Mexicana de Películas)

*La Adelita*

Dir: Guillermo Hernández Gómez

(Iracheta y Elvira)

*Mi Candidato*

Dir: Chano Urueta

(Alfonso Rivas Bustamente)

1938

*Refugiados en Madrid*

Dir: Alejandro Galindo

(Films de Artistas Mexicanos Asociados: FAMA)

*Padre de más de cuatro*

Dir: Roberto O'Quigley

(José Luis Bueno)

*La casa del ogro*

Dir: Fernando de Fuentes

(Compañía Mexicana de Películas)

*Los millones de Chaflán*

Dir: Alejandro Galindo

(Producciones Sánchez y Tello y Cía.)

*Mientras México duerme*

Dir: Alejandro Galindo

(Producciones Iracheta y Elvira)

*La bestia negra*  
Dir: Gabriel Soria  
(Hermanos Soria)

1939      *La noche de las mayas*  
Dir: Chano Urueta  
(FAMA)

*Papacito lindo*  
Dir: Fernando de Fuentes  
(Compañía Nacional de Películas)

*Los de abajo (Con la división del norte)*  
Dir: Chano Urueta  
(Nueva América ó Producciones Amanecer)

*La canción del milagro*  
Dir: Rolando Aguilar  
(Pro-Mex)

*¡Qué viene mi marido!*  
Dir: Chano Urueta  
(Films Mundiales and Filmarte)

1940      *Allá en el trópico*  
Dir: Fernando de Fuentes  
(Producciones Fernando de Fuentes)

*El jefe máximo*  
Dir: Fernando de Fuentes  
(Producciones Fernando de Fuentes and Financiera de Películas, S.A.)

*Con su amable permiso*

Dir: Fernando Soler

(Producciones Azteca)

*El monje loco*

Dir: Alejandro Galindo

(Martínez y Méndez)

*Creo en Dios (Secreto de confesión)*

Dir: Fernando de Fuentes

(Producciones Fernando de Fuentes)

*La casa de rencor*

Dir: Gilbeto Martínez Solares

(Films Mundiales)

1941

*Ni sangre ni arena*

Dir: Alejandro Galindo

(POSA Films)

*El rápido de las 9.15*

Dir: Alejandro Galindo

(CLASA Films)

*¡Ay, qué tiempos, señor Don Simón!*

Dir: Julio Bracho

(Films Mundiales)

*El gendarme desconocido*

Dir: Miguel M Delgado

(POSA Films Internacional)



*La gallina clueca*

Dir: Fernando de Fuentes

(Films Mundiales)

*Virgen de medianoche (El imperio del hampa)*

Dir: Alejandro Galindo

(Ixtla Films)

*Mi viuda alegre*

Dir: Manuel M Delgado

(POSA Films)

1942

*Cuando viajan las estrellas*

Dir: Alberto Gout

(Films Mundiales)

*Historia de un gran amor*

Dir: Julio Bracho

(Films Mundiales)

*Los tres mosqueteros*

Dir: Miguel M Delgado

(POSA Films)

*El verdugo de Sevilla*

Dir: Fernando Soler

(Films Mundiales)

*La Virgen que forjó una patria*

Dir: Julio Bracho

(Films Mundiales)

*El circo*

Dir: Miguel M Delgado  
(POSA Films)

1943

*Flor silvestre*

Dir: Emilio Fernández  
(Films Mundiales)

*El espectro de la novia*

Dir: René Cardona  
(Films Mundiales)

*El as negro*

Dir: René Cardona  
(Films Mundiales)

*La mujer sin cabeza*

Dir: René Cardona  
(Films Mundiales)

*Distinto amanecer*

Dir: Julio Bracho  
(Films Mundiales)

*María Candelaria*

Dir: Emilio Fernández  
(Films Mundiales)

*La fuga*

Dir: Norman Foster  
(Producciones México)

1944

*El corsario negro*

Dir: Chano Urueta

(CLASA Films)

*El intruso*

Dir: Mauricio Magdaleno

(Films Mundiales)

*Adiós Mariquita linda*

Dir: Alfonso Patiño G.

(Luis Manrique)

*Las abandonadas*

Dir: Emilio Fernandez

(Films Mundiales)

*Más allá del amor*

Dir: Adolfo Fernández Bustamante

(Films Mundiales)

*Bugambilia*

Dir: Emilio Fernández

(Films Mundiales)

1945

*Un día con el diablo*

Dir: Miguel M Delgado

(POSA Films)

*Cantaclaro*

Dir: Julio Bracho

(Producciones Interamericanas)

- 1945      *La perla*  
Dir: Emilio Fernández  
(Águila Films)
- 1946      *Su última aventura*  
Dir: Gilberto Martínez Solares  
(Producciones Mercurio)
- Enamorada*  
Dir: Emilio Fernández  
(Panamericana Films)
- 1947      *The Fugitive (El fugitivo)*  
Dir: John Ford  
(Argosy Pictures)
- La casa colorada*  
Dir: Miguel Morayta  
(José Elvira)
- Río Escondido*  
Dir: Emilio Fernández  
(Raúl de Anda)
- María la O*  
Dir: Adolfo Fernández Bustamante  
(Producciones Amador)
- 1948      *Maclovía*  
Dir: Emilio Fernández  
(Filmex)

*Dueña y señora*

Dir: Tito Davison

(Filmex)

*Medianoche*

Dir: Tito Davison

(Filmex)

*Salón México*

Dir: Emilio Fernández

(Films Mundiales)

*Pueblerina*

Dir: Emilio Fernández

(Ultramar Films with Producciones Reforma)

*Prisión de sueños*

Dir: Victor Uruchúa

(Artistas y Técnicos Asociados)

1949

*El embajador*

Dir: Tito Davison

(Filmex)

*Opio (la droga maldita)*

Dir: Ramón Peón

(Maya Films)

*La malquerida*

Dir: Emilio Fernández

(Francisco de P. Cabrera)

*Un Cuerpo de Mujer*

Dir: Tito Davison

*Duelo en las montañas*

Dir: Emilio Fernández

(CLASA Films Mundiales)

*The Torch (Del odio nació el amor)*

Dir: Emilio Fernández

(Eagle Lion)

*Nuestras vidas*

Dir: Ramón Peón

(Ramón Pereda)

1950

*Un día de vida*

Dir: Emilio Fernández

(Cabrera Films)

*Los olvidados*

Dir: Luis Buñuel

(Ultramar Films)

*Víctimas del pecado*

Dir: Emilio Fernández

(Producciones Calderón)

*Pecado*

Dir: Luis César Amadori

(Filmex)

*Islas Marías*

Dir: Emilio Fernández

(Rodríguez Hermanos)

*El gavián pollero*

Dir: Rogelio A González

(Producciones Mier y Brooks)

*El bombero atómico*

Dir: Miguel M Delgado

(POSA Films)

*Siempre tuya*

Dir: Emilio Fernández

(Cinematográfica Industrial Productora de Películas)

1951

*Los pobres van al Cielo*

Dir: Jaime Salvador

(Modesto Pacó y Felipe Cahero)

*Un gallo en corral ajeno*

Dir: Julián Soler

(Industrial Productora de Películas, CIPPSA)

*La bienamada*

Dir: Emilio Fernández

(Producciones México)

*Hay un niño en su futuro*

Dir: Fernando Cortés

(Industrial Productora de Películas, CIPPSA)

*El mar y tú*

Dir: Emilio Fernández

(Producciones Galindo Hermanos)

*¡Ahí viene Martín Corona!*

Dir: Miguel Zacarías

(Producciones Zacarías)

*El enamorado*

Dir: Miguel Zacarías

(Producciones Zacarias)

1952

*El rebozo de soledad*

Dir: Roberto Gavaldón

(STPC de la RM and Cinematográfica TeleVoz)

*Ni pobres ni ricos*

Dir: Fernando Cortés

(Televoz)

*Cuando levanta la niebla*

Dir: Emilio Fernández

(Tele Voz)

*El Señor fotógrafo*

Dir: Miguel M Delgado

(Posa Films Internacional)

*Ansiedad*

Dir: Miguel Zacarías

(Producciones Zacarías)

*Él*

Dir: Luis Buñuel

(Ultramar Films)



1953

*Camelia*

Dir: Roberto Gavaldón

(Filmex)

*Llévame en tus brazos*

Dir: Julio Bracho

(Producciones Calderón)

*El niño y la niebla*

Dir: Roberto Gavaldón

(Cinematográfica Grovas)

*La Rosa Blanca (Marti)*

Dir: Emilio Fernández

(Películas Antillas)

1954

*La rebelión de los colgados*

Dir: Emilio Fernández and Alfredo B Crevenna

(José Kohn)

*La mujer X*

Dir: Julián Soler

(Filmex)

*Pueblo, Canto y Esperanza*

Dir: Rogelio A González

(Alianza Cinematográfica)

*Estafa de amor*

Dir: Miguel M Delgado

(Filmadora Chapultepec)

*El monstruo en la sombra*

Dir: Zacarías Gómez Urquiza

(Producciones Cub-Mex)

1955

*La Doncella de Piedra*

Dir: Miguel M Delgado

(Filmadora Chapultepec)

*Historia de un amor*

Dir: Roberto Gavaldón

(Internacional Cinematográfica)

*La escondida*

Dir: Roberto Gavaldón

(Alfa Films)

*Canasta de cuentos mexicanos*

Dir: Julio Bracho

(José Kohn)

*La Tierra del Fuego se apaga*

Dir: Emilio Fernández

(Mapol)

1956

*Una cita de amor*

Dir: Emilio Fernández

(Cinematográfica Latino Americana y Unipromex)

*Sueños de oro*

Dir: Miguel Zacarías

(Producciones Zacarías and Suevia Films)

*El bolero de Raquel*

Dir: Miguel M Delgado

(POSA Films Internacional)

*Mujer en Condominio*

Dir: Rogelio A González

(Cinematográfica Latinoamericana and Ramex Films)

1957

*Aquí está Heraclio Bernal*

Dir: Roberto Galvadón

(Cinematográfica Cumbre)

*La venganza de Heraclio Bernal*

Dir: Roberto Galvadón

(Cinematográfica Cumbre)

*La rebelión de la sierra*

Dir: Roberto Galvadón

(Cinematográfica Cumbre)

*Flor de mayo*

Dir: Roberto Galvadón

(Cinematográfica Latino Americana)

*Una golfa*

Dir: Tulio Demicheli

(Producciones México)

*La sonrisa de la Virgen*

Dir: Roberto Rodríguez

(Películas Rodríguez)

- 1958      *Carabina 30-30*  
Dir: Miguel M Delgado  
(Filmadora Chapultepec and Galindo Hermanos)
- Impaciencia del corazón*  
Dir: Tito Davison  
(Filmadora Chapultepec and Galindo Hermanos)
- Café Colón*  
Dir: Benito Alazraki  
(Filmadora Chapultepec and Galindo Hermanos)
- Isla para dos*  
Dir: Tito Davison  
(F. Mier S.A.)
- Nazarín*  
Dir: Luis Buñuel  
(Producciones Barbachano Ponce)
- 1958      *La cucaracha*  
Dir: Ismael Rodríguez  
(Películas Rodríguez)
- La estrella vacía*  
Dir: Emilio Gómez Muriel  
(Producciones Corsa)
- 1959      *Sonatas*  
Dir: Juan Antonio Bardem (Con Cecilio Paniagua)  
(Producciones Barbachano Ponce)

*Los ambiciosos (La fièvre monte à El Pao)*

Dir: Luis Buñuel

(Filmex and Films Broderie)

*Macario*

Dir: Roberto Galvadón

(CLASA films)

1960 *The Young One (La joven)*

Dir: Luis Buñuel

(Producciones Olmeca)

*Juana Gallo*

Dir: Miguel Zacarías

(Producciones Zacarías)

1961 *La Rosa Blanca*

Dir: Roberto Galvadón

(CLASA Films Mundiales)

*Ánimas Trujano*

(Un Hombre Importante)

Dir: Ismael Rodríguez

(Películas Rodríguez)

*El tejedor de milagros*

Dir: Francisco del Villar

(Sagitario Films)

1962 *El ángel exterminador*

Dir: Luis Buñuel

(Gustavo Alatriste)

*Días de otoño*

Dir: Roberto Gavaldón

(CLASA Films Mundiales)

1963

*El hombre de papel*

Dir: Ismael Rodríguez

(Ismael Rodríguez)

*Entrega inmediata*

Dir: Miguel M Delgado

(POSA Films)

*En la mitad del mundo*

Dir: Ramón Pereda

(Productora Ecuador)

*The Night of the Iguana*

Dir: John Huston

1964

*Escuela para solteras*

Dir: Miguel Zacarías

(Producciones Zacarías)

*El gallo de oro*

Dir: Roberto Galvadón

(CLASA Films Mundiales)

*Los tres calaveras*

Dir: Fernando Cortés

(CLASA Films Mundiales)

*Los cuatro Juanes*

Dir: Miguel Zacarías

(Producciones Zacarías)

*Simón del Desierto*

Dir: Luis Buñuel

(Gustavo Alatriste)

1965

*Un alma pura*

Dir: Juan Ibañez

(Producciones Barbachano Ponce)

*Las dos Elenas*

Dir: José Luis Ibañez

(Producciones Barbachano Ponce)

*Lola de mi vida*

Dir: Miguel Barbachano Ponce

(Producciones Barbachano Ponce)

*Cargamento prohibido*

Dir: Miguel M Delgado

(CLASA Films Mundiales)

*¡Viva Benito Canales!*

Dir: Miguel M Delgado

(Películas Mundiales and TV Producciones)

1966

*Pedro Páramo*

Dir: Carlos Velo

(CLASA Films Mundiales)

*El asesino se embarca*

Dir: Miguel M Delgado

(CLASA Films Mundiales)

*El escapulario*

Dir: Servando González

(Producciones Yanco)

*Domingo salvaje*

Dir: Francisco del Villar

(Sagitario Films)

1966

*El cuarto chino*

(The Chinese Room)

Dir: Albert Zugsmith

(Famous Players Co. with CLASA Films Mundiales and  
Sagitario Films)

*Su excelencia*

Dir: Miguel M Delgado

(POSA Films)

*Los ángeles de Puebla*

Dir: Francisco del Villar

(Producciones Bueno)

1967

*El jinete fantasma*

Dir: Albert Zugsmith

(Famous Players Co. with CLASA Films Mundiales and  
Sagitario Films)

*Mariana*

Dir: Juan Guerrero

(Juan Guerrero)



*Corazón Salvaje*

Dir: Tito Davison

(CLASA Films Mundiales with Durona Productions and  
Contra Cuadro)

*¿La Pax?*

Dir: Wolf Rilla

(Comité Organizador de los XIX Juegos Olímpicos)

1968

*El terrón de azúcar/The Big Cube*

Dir: Tito Davison

(Producciones Anco and Motion Picture International)

*Narda o el verano*

Dir: Juan Guerrero

(CLASA Films Mundiales)

1969

*Two Mules for Sister Sarah*

Dir: Don Siegel

(Universal Pictures)

1970

*Kelly's Heroes*

Dir: Brian C Hutton

(Metro Goldwyn Meyer)

*La generala*

Dir: Juan Ibañez

(CLASA Films Mundiales)

*El cielo y tú*

Dir: Gilberto Gazcón

(Producciones Brooks)

*El profe*

Dir: Miguel M Delgado

(POSA Films)

1971

*Los hijos de Satanás*

Dir: Rafael Balédon

(Producciones Brooks)

*Hijazo de mi vidaza*

Dir: Rafael Baledón

(Oro Films)

*María*

Dir: Tito Davison

(Ramón Pereda and CLASA Films Mundiales)

1972

*El monasterio de los buitres*

Dir: Francisco del Villar

(Estudios Churubusco and Francisco del Villar)

*El señor de Osanto*

Dir: Jaime Humberto Hermosillo

(Estudios Churubusco)

*Once a Scoundrel*

Dir: George Shaefer

(Carlyle Productions)

*Interval*

Dir: Daniel Mann

(Euro-American and Estudios Churubusco)

- 1973      *El amor tiene cara de mujer*  
Dir: Tito Davison  
(CLASA Films Mundiales)
- Los perros de Dios*  
Dir: Francisco del Villar  
(Estudios Churubusco)
- 1974      *El llanto de la tortuga*  
Dir: Francisco del Villar  
(CONACINE)
- Presagio*  
Dir: Luis Alcoriza  
(CONACINE and Producciones Escorpión)
- 1975      *Coronación*  
Dir: Sergio Olhovich  
(CONACINE and CLASA Films Mundiales)
- La vida cambia*  
Dir: José Estrada  
(CONACINE and STPC)
- Maten al León*  
Dir: José Estrada  
(CONACINE and DASA)
- Cananea*  
Dir: Marcela Fernández Violante  
(CONACINE)

- 1975      *Los aztecas*  
 Dir: Marcel Boudou  
 (TV France)
- 1977      *Divinas palabras*  
 Dir: Juan Ibañez  
 (CONACINE)
- La casa del pelícano*  
 Dir: Sergio Véjar  
 (CONACINE)
- Los hijos de Sánchez*  
 Dir: Hal Barlett  
 (CONACINE)
- D.F.*  
 Dir: Rogelio González  
 (CONACINE)
- Te quiero*  
 Dir: Tito Davison  
 (CONACINE)
- 1978      *A paso de cojo*  
 Dir: Luis Alcoriza  
 (CONACINE and Producciones Escorpión)
- Casa Pedro Domecq*  
 Dir: Juan Ibañez  
 (commercial)

- 1980      *El jugador de ajedrez*  
Dir: Juan Luis Buñuel  
(TV France)
- México mágico*  
Dir: Alejandro Tavera  
Raúl Zermeño/Luis Mandoki
- 1981      *México 2000*  
Dir: Rogelio González  
(CONACINE)
- El heroe desconocido*  
Dir: Julián Pastor  
(Televisine S.A. de C.V.)
- 1983      *El corazón de la noche*  
Dir: Jaime Humberto Hermosillo  
(Conacite Uno)
- Under the Volcano*  
Dir: John Huston  
(Conacite Uno and Ithaca)

*Allá en el Rancho Grande*

(Over on the Rancho Grande)

Production: (1936) Fernando de Fuentes, Alfonso Rivas Bustamente, Antonio Díaz Lombardo

Director: Fernando de Fuentes

Script: Guz Águila, Luz Guzmán de Arellano adapted for cinema by Fernando de Fuentes and Guz Águila

Music: Lorenzo Barcelata. Songs: Lorenzo Barcelata *Amenecer ranchero*, *Por ti aprendí a querer*, *Lucha María*, *Coplas* and *Presumida*, José López Alavés *Canción mixteca*, Anonymous, *Allá en el Rancho Grande*

Sound: B.J. Kroger

Editor: Fernando de Fuentes

Cast: Tito Guízar (José Francisco Ruelas), René Cardona (Felipe), Esther Fernández (Cruz), Lorenzo Barcelata (Martín), Emma Roldán (Ángela), Carlos López *Chaflán* (Florentino), Margarita Cortés (Eulalia), Dolores Camarillo (Marcelina), Manuel Noriega (Don Rosendo), Hernán Vera (Don Venancio), Alfonso Sánchez Tello (Nabor Peña), David Valle González (Don Nicho), Carlos L. Cabello (Emeterio), Armando Alemán (José Francisco child), Gaspar Nuñez (Felipe child), Lucha María Avila (Cruz child), Clifford Carr (Gringo Pete), Paco Martínez (doctor), Juan García (Gabino), Jesús Melgarejo, Emilio Fernández and Olga Falcón (dancers), Trío Murciélagos, Trío Tariácuri

Duration: 100 minutes

Further details

*Allá en el Rancho Grande* was the first international commercial success for Mexican cinema. Figueroa won his first award for best cinematography in the Venice Film Festival in 1938 and was awarded a prize by the film critics in Mexico. The film was also the first Mexican film to be subtitled for the US market.

Synopsis:

The film is set at the large hacienda of Rancho Grande, whose lands border onto the Rancho Chico. Felipe (Cardona) inherits the ranch and appoints his childhood friend, José Francisco (Guízar) as the ranch foreman. José Francisco is in love with Cruz (Fernández), with whom he and his sister Eulalia (Cortés) have grown up. Ángela, their godmother adopted the brother and sister when their mother died and although Cruz was part of the family, Ángela has treated

her as a servant since she was a child. When José Francisco is seriously injured, Felipe donates blood to his friend to save his life. Whilst the foreman is away at another ranch, Ángela offers Cruz to Felipe in exchange for money. Cruz, who is asthmatic, has an attack when Felipe tries to seduce her. In her delirium she repeats José Francisco's name and Felipe realises they are in love and escorts Cruz home. However, two watchmen notice them together and tell the other ranch hands that the two are lovers. Martín (Barcelata) engages in a singing competition with his rival, José Francisco, during which he tells what has happened between Cruz and Felipe. José Francisco challenges Felipe but Felipe finally convinces him of the truth. The film ends with a mass wedding of José Francisco and Cruz, Felipe and Marcelina (Camarillo) Eulalia and the owner of the Rancho Chico, Don Rosendo (Noriega), Ángela and Florentino (*Chaflán*).

*Río Escondido*  
(Hidden River)

Production: (1947) Raúl de Anda

Director: Emilio Fernández

Script: Emilio Fernández and Mauricio Magdaleno

Music: Francisco Domínguez

Sound: Eduardo Fernández

Editor: Gloria Schoemann

Cast: María Félix (Rosaura Salazar), Domingo Soler (priest), Carlos López Moctezuma (Regino Sandoval), Fernando Fernández (Doctor Felipe Navarro), Eduardo Arozamena (Marcelino), Columba Domínguez (Merceditas), Manuel Dondé (El Rengo), Carlos Múzquiz (Leonardo), Agustín Isunza (Brígido), Roberto Cañedo (Presidential assistant), President Miguel Alemán (himself)

Duration: 96 minutes

Further details

The film for which Figueroa won best cinematography awards at the Mexican Academy of Arts and Cinematographic Sciences and at the Karlovy Vary film festival in Czechoslovakia.

Synopsis:

Schoolteacher Rosaura Salazar (Félix) is sent, by presidential mandate to the remote village of Río Escondido. She collapses en route and is revived by Felipe, a visiting doctor (Fernández) who accompanies her to the village. Río Escondido is ruled by the local *cacique* Regino Sandoval (López Moctezuma) who rules with violence and cruelty. The village is in the throes of a drought and Don Regino refuses to supply water to the villagers from his personal well. Rosaura reclaims the schoolhouse taken over by Regino to stable his horses and the school becomes a central point for the villagers. When Regino contracts smallpox, Felipe saves his life, only on condition that Regino buy in enough vaccine to immunise the villagers. After Regino fails to persuade Rosaura to be his mistress, he rapes her. Rosaura shoots him and then suffers a heart attack. Felipe treats her and reveals that he is in love with her. She dies after receiving a letter of commendation from the President.



*Ánimas Trujano (El hombre important)*

Ánimas Trujano (The Important Man)

Production: (1961) Rodríguez Films

Director: Ismael Rodríguez

Script: Adapted from the novel by Rogelio Barriga Rivas by Ismael Rodríguez

Music: Raúl Lavista

Sound: Manuel Topete

Editor: Jorge Bustos

Cast: Toshiro Mifune (Ánimas Trujano), Antonio Aguilar (Tadeo), Columba Domínguez (Juana), Flor Silvestre (Catalina), Pepito Romay (Pedro), Titina Romay (Dorotea), Eduardo Fajardo (Spanish hacienda owner), Amado Zumaya (*compadre*), José Chávez Trowe (shaman), Luis Aragón (shopkeeper), Juan Carlos Pulido (Belarmino), Jaime Jiménez Pons (El Carrizo), Arturo Bigotón Castro (judge)

Duration: 100 minutes

Further details

The renowned Japanese actor, Toshiro Mifune agreed to play the main character, Oaxacan Indian, Ánimas Trujano. Mifune did not speak Spanish well and his voice was eventually dubbed by Narciso Busquets. In Mexico Figueroa was awarded the *Diosa de Plata* for the film and best cinematography at the San Francisco Film Festival.

Synopsis:

Ánimas Trujano (Mifune) has an ambition to be powerful and 'important'. However, because he is lazy and a drunkard, he has little chance to fulfil his ambition to be the *mayordomo* of his community and it is his long-suffering wife Juana (Domínguez) who supports Ánimas and the family. Juana persuades

Ánimas to work with the family at the local mezcal hacienda. His daughter Dorotea (Romay) has a brief affair with the *hacendado's* son Belarmino (Pulido). Enraged, Ánimas challenges Belarmino and is imprisoned. Dorotea gives birth to a son. Dorotea leaves the village with her longtime boyfriend El

Carrizo (Pons) who refuses to take the baby. Juana works hard to save money to buy land. However, Ánimas is released unexpectedly from jail and beats Juana for not using the money to bail him out. He then spends Juana's savings on local prostitute Catalina (Flor Silvestre). Having gambled his money away Ánimas offers his soul to the devil. He is, however, tricked by a local shaman who tells him money will arrive the next day. The *hacendado* arrives and asks for his grandson. He persuades Juana that the baby will have a better life if he brings him up. She refuses money for the baby, but Ánimas accepts. With the money Ánimas is able to become *mayordomo*. The villagers, however, reject him knowing that he sold his grandson. At the fiesta Juana stabs Catalina. Ánimas, realises his errors and full of remorse takes the blame for the killing.

*Salon México*

(*Salon México*)

Production: (1948) CLASA Films Mundiales

Director: Emilio Fernández

Script: Mauricio Magdaleno and Emilio Fernández

Music: Antonio Díaz Conde

Sound: Rodolfo Solís and José de Pérez

Editor: Gloria Schoemann

Cast: Marga López (Mercedes López), Miguel Inclán (Lupe López), Rodolfo Acosta (Paco), Roberto Cañedo (Roberto), Mimí Derba (Headmistress), Silvia Derbez (Beatriz), Estela Matute (cabaret girl), José Torvay (deaf policeman), Maruja Grifell (teacher) Son Clave de Oro, Mulatas de Fuego and Celia Cruz (cabaret bands)

Duration: 95 minutes

Further details

The film won best film and the cinematography award for Figueroa at the Festival Mondial du Film et des Beaux Arts in Brussels.

Synopsis:

Set in Mexico City, Mercedes (López) works as a *cabaretera* in the nightclub Salón México under the violent control of her pimp, Paco (Acosta). All the money she earns pays for her sister Beatriz's (Derbez) education at an expensive boarding school. Mercedes tells Beatriz and the headmistress (Derba) that she is a business woman to prevent them knowing what she does and how she pays the fees. Paco is caught hiding in Mercedes's small room and Mercedes is arrested as his accomplice. Lupe (Inclán) the club security guard, who is in love with Mercedes, visits Beatriz at school on Mercedes's behalf to tell her that Mercedes is away on business. Mercedes is eventually released and agrees to the marriage of Beatriz and war hero, pilot Roberto (Cañedo) the headmistress's son. Mercedes shoots Paco when he threatens to reveal

Mercedes's secret to the school and Roberto and with his final effort, Paco kills Beatriz.

*Días de otoño*  
(Days of Autumn)

Production: (1962) CLASA Films Mundiales

Director: Roberto Gavaldón

Script: Adapted from the Bruno Traven short story *Frustration* by Julio Alejandro and Emilio Carballido

Music: Raúl Lavista

Sound: Jesús González Gancy and Galdino Samperio

Editor: Gloria Schoemann

Cast: Pino Pellicer (Luisa), Ignacio López Tarso (Albino), Evangelina Elizondo (Rita), Adriana Roel (Alicia), Luis Lomelí (Carlos), Enrique García Álvarez (priest), Hortensia Santoveña (doctor), Eva Calvo (customer), Guillermo Orea (photographer), José Chávez Trowe (chauffeur)

Duration: 95 minutes

Further details

Figueroa won the *Diosa de Plata*, the cinema critics award in Mexico and best cinematography at the Panamá Film Festival. The film is the third and final adaptation Gavaldón made from Bruno Traven's stories.

Synopsis:

Luisa (Pellicer), a naïve, shy, small town girl, arrives in Mexico City with a letter from her recently deceased aunt. It is a letter of introduction to Don Albino (López Tarso), the owner of a patisserie, requesting that he give Luisa a job. This he agrees to do. It becomes quickly apparent that Luisa is a daydreamer. She becomes friends with fellow shop assistant Rita (Elizondo), a city-born woman who is worldly, independent and single. As the film develops, Luisa's daydreams of a boyfriend and love transform into a neurotic psychosis in which she invents a husband Carlos (Lomelí) and fakes a pregnancy and subsequent motherhood, whilst rejecting the possibility of a real relationship with the widower Albino and

his two small sons. The film concludes somewhat uneasily with Albino proposing to help Luisa and marry her. This motivates Luisa to give up her fantasy child (her husband Carlos has already 'died' in an accident), supposedly to live happily ever after with Albino.

*Los olvidados*

(The Young and the Damned)

Production: (1950) Ultramar film , Óscar Dancigers

Director: Luis Buñuel

Script: Luis Buñuel and Luis Alcoriza

Music: Rudolf Halffter

Sound: José B. Carles and Jesús González Gancy

Editor: Carlos Savage

Cast: Stella Inda (Pedro's mother), Miguel Inclán (Don Carmelo, the blindman), Alfonso Mejía (Pedro), Roberto Cobo (El Jaibo), Alma Delia Fuentes (Meche), Efraín Arauz (Cacarizo), Jorge Pérez (Pelón), Javier Amezcua (Julián), Mario Ramírez (Ojitos), Francisco Jambrina (farm director), Jesús García Navarro (Julián's father), Juan Villegas (Cacarizo's grandfather), Héctor López Portillo (judge)

Duration: 88 minutes

Further details

The first film on which Figueroa collaborated with Buñuel, *Los olvidados* initially had a bad reception in Mexico. It was subsequently acclaimed when it won best film at the Cannes Film Festival. Figueroa was awarded an Ariel de Plata by the Academia Mexicana de Ciencias y Artes Cinematográficas for the film.

Synopsis:

El Jaibo (Cobo), an adolescent delinquent, escapes from reform school and goes back to his neighbourhood to find his friends. With two other children, Pedro (Mejía) and El Pelón (Pérez), Jaibo tries to rob the blind beggar Don Carmelo (Inclán). Pedro meets Ojitos who has been abandoned by his father in the market. Pedro takes Ojitos to Meche (Fuentes) and El Cacarizo (Arauz), whose grandfather sells donkey milk. Jaibo kills Julián, a young building worker, who was responsible for Jaibo's being put into reform school. Pedro witnesses the killing and is threatened to secrecy by Jaibo. Don Carmelo takes

on Ojitos as his assistant and exploits him. Pedro, in an effort to make up to his mother and to learn a trade to earn money for the family, apprentices himself to an ironmonger. Jaibo steals a knife from the shop. Pedro is accused of the theft and is sent to reform school. Jaibo has, meanwhile, become the lover of Pedro's mother. In the reform school, Pedro finds it hard to adjust and in his frustration kills some chickens. The Director feels he needs to take responsibility and be trusted and so sends him out with fifty pesos to buy cigarettes. Pedro, pleased at the responsibility given to him goes out of the school only to run in to Jaibo, who steals the money and runs off. Pedro follows him back to the neighbourhood. Jaibo beats him and Pedro shouts out to everyone that it was Jaibo who killed Julián. Jaibo kills Pedro and is in his turn shot by the police. Pedro's body, hidden by Jaibo in the donkey stable is taken secretly to the rubbish tip by the grandfather, who dumps his body into a gully full of garbage.



*El ángel exterminador*  
(The Exterminating Angel)

Production: Gustavo Alatriste

Director: Luis Buñuel

Script: Luis Buñuel and Luis Alcoriza

Music: Musical director, Raúl Lavista with extracts from Scarlatti, Beethoven, Chopin, Paradisi and Gregorian chants

Sound: José B. Carles

Editor: Carlos Savage

Cast: Silvia Pinal (Leticia, The Valkyrie), Enrique Rambal (Edmundo Nóbile), Jacqueline Andere (Alicia de Roc), José Baviera (Leandro Gómez), Augusto Benedico (Doctor Carlos Conde), Luis Beristáin (Cristián Ugalde), Antonio Bravo (Russell), Claudio Brook (Julio the butler), César de Campo (Colonel Alvaro), Rosa Elena Durgel (Silvia), Lucy Gallardo (Lucía de Nóbile), Enrique García Álvarez (Alberto Roc), Ofelia Guilmáin (Juana Ávila), Nadia Haro Oliva (Ana Maynar), Tito Junco (Raúl), Xavier Loyá (Francisco Ávila), Xavier Massé (Eduardo), Ángel Merino (Lucas), Ofelia Montesco (Beatriz), Patricia Morán (Rita Ugalde), Patricia de Morelos (Blanca), Berta Moss (Leonora), Enrique del Castillo (abbot), Chel López (priest)

Duration: 93 minutes

Further details

Although the film did not win any major prizes, it was well received by critics in Mexico and internationally and has become one of Buñuel's most lauded films.

Synopsis:

After a night at the opera, the bourgeois Nóbile couple (Rambal and Gallardo) invite friends for supper. Before they arrive, the servants of the house begin to leave because of an inexplicable urge to flee from the house. During dinner, the remaining waiters disappear leaving only Julio (Brook) the butler. The guests retire to the music room. However, they find they cannot leave. The following morning, Julio the butler also cannot exit from the room when he

enters it to serve coffee. The guests are trapped. Over the following days, their behaviour disintegrates, they begin to have hallucinations. Sheep and a bear roam the house. Russell (Bravo) dies and the young engaged couple, Francisco and Beatriz (Ávila and Montesco) commit suicide. Meanwhile, outside, crowds gather to watch the house. It is Leticia (Pinal) who solves the situation by making the guests re-enact the actions of the night of the opera. The guests attend a mass in the cathedral to celebrate their escape. At the end of the mass no one can leave the building. A flock of sheep rush into the cathedral.

*Él*  
(He)

Production: Ultramar Films, Óscar Dancigers

Director: Luis Buñuel

Script: Adapted from the novel by Mercedes Pinto by Luis Buñuel and Luis Alcoriza

Music: Luis Hernández Bretón

Sound: José de Pérez and Jesús González Gancy

Editor: Carlos Savage

Cast: Arturo de Córdova (Francisco Galván de Montemayor), Delia Garcés (Gloria Peralta), Luis Beristáin (Raúl Conde), Aurora Walker (Esperanza Peralta), Carlos Martínez Baena (Father Velasco), Manuel Dondé (Pablo, the butler), Rafael Banquells (Ricardo Luján)

Duration: 91 minutes

Further details

*Él* was Figueroa's second film with Buñuel after the international success of *Los olvidados* and signaled Buñuel's return to his more overtly surrealist preoccupations of *amour fou* and psychological disorder.

Synopsis:

Noticing Gloria (Garcés) in a ceremony in church, where the bishop washes the feet of the altar boys, the wealthy and pious bourgeois, Francisco (de Córdova), becomes obsessed with her. He discovers from following her that her fiancé, Raúl (Beristáin), is an old friend of his and arranges a drinks party so that she will be invited. Francisco fascinates Gloria and she leaves Raúl. Sometime later, Raúl meets Gloria who is very distressed in the street. She tells him of her marriage to Francisco and the film goes into flashback. On their honeymoon it is apparent that Francisco is a very jealous and obsessive man to the point of paranoia. He is jealous of everyone and when Gloria meets an old school friend Rafael (Banquells) he believes that the friend begins to follow them. Francisco attacks Rafael and has him thrown out of the hotel. Back in Mexico, Francisco becomes jealous of the young lawyer, Beltrán, whom he has contracted to do some legal work. Despite the fact that he beats Gloria and keeps her

locked in her room, Francisco appears to all around them, (including Gloria's mother (Walker) and the priest (Baena), as a decent, upright husband and citizen. Gloria has a nervous breakdown after Francisco fires blanks at her and then tries to throw her out of a bell tower. End of flashback. Gloria stands up for herself against Francisco when he accuses her of having an affair with Raúl (he sees him drop her off in his car after their meeting). Francisco begs her forgiveness and asks for her love and patience. Gloria helps him write some letters to resolve the now very difficult legal problems with property he owns in Guanajuato. After he makes her confess her conversation with Raúl, Francisco enters into Gloria's bedroom at night with a needle, thread and rope to tie her up. She awakes as he is trying to tie her to the bed. The servants hear her screams, Francisco escapes and Gloria leaves the house. Francisco, desperate and paranoid, tries to find her and finally goes to the church where he first saw her. Inside the church he hallucinates that everyone is laughing at him and attacks the priest. A few years later. Gloria and Raúl are married and they have a son. They visit a monastery where Francisco is leading a quiet life as a monk. The final image is of Francisco zig-zagging his way along the path to the cloister.

## National Awards

- |      |   |
|------|---|
| 1936 | <i>Alla en el Rancho Grande</i><br>Periodistas Cinematográficas                               |
| 1937 | <i>Bajo el cielo de México</i><br>Periodistas Cinematográficas                                |
| 1938 | <i>Mientras México duerme</i><br>Periodistas Cinematográficas                                 |
| 1939 | <i>La noche de las mayas</i><br>Comité Nacional de la Industria Cinematográfica               |
| 1940 | <i>La casa de rencor</i><br>Periodistas Cinematográficas                                      |
| 1942 | <i>Historia de un gran amor</i><br>Periodistas Cinematográficas                               |
| 1943 | <i>Flor Silvestre</i><br>Periodistas Cinematográficas   |
| 1944 | <i>María Candelaria</i><br>Periodistas Cinematográficas                                       |
| 1946 | <i>Enamorada</i><br>Ariel de plata, Academia Mexicana de Ciencias y Artes<br>Cinematográficas |
| 1947 | <i>La perla</i><br>Ariel de plata, Academia Mexicana de Ciencias y Artes<br>Cinematográficas  |

- 1948 *Río Escondido*  
Ariel de plata, Academia Mexicana de Ciencias y Artes  
Cinematográficas
- 1949 *Pueblerina*  
Ariel de plata, Academia Mexicana de Ciencias y Artes  
Cinematográficas
- 1950 *Los olvidados*  
Ariel de plata, Academia Mexicana de Ciencias y Artes  
Cinematográficas
- 1952 *El rebozo de Soledad*  
Ariel de plata, Academia Mexicana de Ciencias y Artes  
Cinematográficas
- 1953 *El niño y la niebla*  
Ariel de plata, Academia Mexicana de Ciencias y Artes  
Cinematográficas
- 1958 *La sonrisa de la Virgen*  
Instituto Católico de Cinematografía
- 1960 *Macario*  
Centro Deportivo Israelita  
Instituto Católico de Cinematografía  
*La cucaracha*  
Centro Deportivo Israelita
- 1962 *Ánimas Trujano*  
Centro Deportivo Israelita  
PECIME, Diosa de Plata  
*Juana Gallo*  
Centro Deportivo Israelita

- 1963      *El hombre de papel*  
Instituto Católico de Cinematografía
- 1964      *Días de otoño*  
PECIME Diosa de Plata
- 1966      *¡Viva Benito Canales!*  
Instituto Católico de Cinematografía
- 1973      *María*  
Ariel de plata, Academia Mexicana de Ciencias y Artes  
Cinematográficas
- 1978      *Divinas palabras*  
Ariel de plata, Academia Mexicana de Ciencias y Artes  
Cinematográficas  
PECIME Diosa de Plata

## International Awards

- 1938      *Allá en el Rancho Grande*  
La Mostra Internazionale de Venezia, Italy
- 1946      *María Candelaria*  
Festival du Film de Cannes, France
- 1947      *Enamorada*  
Festival Mondial du Film et des Beaux Arts, Brussels, Belgium
- 1948      *La perla*  
La Mostra Internazionale de Venezia, Italy  
*Río Escondido*  
Karlovy Vary Film Festival, Czechoslovakia  
*Salón México*  
Festival Mondial du Film et des Beaux Arts, Brussels, Belgium
- 1949      *La perla*  
Madrid Film Festival, Spain  
Golden Globe, Los Angeles, US  
*Maclovía*  
Karlovy Vary Film Festival, Czechoslovakia  
*La malquerida*  
La Mostra Internazionale de Venezia, Italy
- 1950      *Pueblerina*  
Karlovy Vary Film Festival, Czechoslovakia  
Madrid Film Festival, Spain
- 1960      *Macario*  
Festival du Film de Cannes, France



- 1961      *Macario*  
Boston Film Festival, US  
Ánimas Trujano  
San Francisco Film Festival, US
- 1964      *Días de otoño*  
Panamá Film Festival
- 1965      *The Night of the Iguana*  
Oscar nomination, Los Angeles, US
- 1968      *El escapulario*  
World Hemisfair, US
- 1978      *Cananea*  
Czechoslovakian Dramatic Artists Union's Award  
Karlovy Vary Film Festival, Czechoslovakia

## Special Awards

- 1947            Gold Medal: Society of Sciences and Arts, Mexico City
- 1967            Honorary Doctorate: St Mary's University, San Antonio, Texas
- 1971            National Arts Award, Mexico
- 1972            Salvador Toscano Award, Mexico
- 1977            Special Achievement Award, Diosa de Plata, Mexico
- 1978            Czechoslovakian Dramatic Artists Union Award
- 1981            Quetzalcoatl Award, Mexico City
- 1982            Outstanding Achievement: Universidad Autónoma de México
- 1983            Dolores del Río award, Mexico City
- 1984            Tribute at the San Francisco Film Festival
- 1985            Tribute at the Museum of Photographic Arts, San Diego
- 1986            Tribute at the Rivertown Film Festival, Saint Paul, Missouri  
Tribute at the Toronto International Festival, Toronto  
Fiftieth Anniversary Tribute of *Allá en el Rancho Grande*,  
Cineteca Nacional, Mexico City
- 1987            Mexican Film Producers and Distributors Award  
Olmec Head Award, Tabasco, Mexico  
Golden Ariel for Lifetime Achievement, Academia Mexicana  
de Ciencias y Artes Cinematográficas

- 1989 Freedom of Xalapa, Veracruz, Mexico
- 1990 Tribute: Cinemafest 90, San Juan, Puerto Rico
- 1991 Tribute: UCLA Film and Television Archive, Los Angeles
- 1992 Tribute: Valladolid Festival, Spain
- 1994 American Society of Cinematographers International Award,  
Los Angeles  
Tribute: Munich Film Festival  
Tribute: National Lottery, Mexico City

## **CAMERA CREW**

**Cinematographer, director of photography, D.P., operator, lighting**

**cameraman, cameraman:** Head of the camera department. Primary responsibility is the photographic elements of a film.

**Camera operator:** Works closely with the cinematographer and the director to determine camera position and movement during the shot. Physically works camera during shooting.

**Focus puller (1<sup>st</sup> camera assistant):** Works with cinematographer to calculate focus and manipulate any changes of focus during a shot.

**Clapper loader (2<sup>nd</sup> camera assistant):** Loads and unloads film stock. Keeps daily camera log with notes for film laboratory. Works clapperboard to identify each shot.

**Grip:** Mounts and moves cameras. If cinematographer requires tracks the grip lays the track and pushes/pulls the dolly as required. On large productions there may be a team of grips headed by a **Key grip**.

**Gaffer:** Head of lighting department. Works with cinematographer and instructs lighting team to set up lights for each shot. Hires and supplies the lighting units and accessories required for shoot.

**Sparks:** Electricians who set up and control power supply and rig lights in line with cinematographer's and gaffer's instructions.

## SHOOTING TERMS

**Blocking:** Technical rehearsal to determine actors' positions and movements in relation to camera.

**Coverage:** A group of shots that cover a scene. Designed by the director and cinematographer to ensure all action in scene is covered in line with script. Consists of all the shots needed to successfully edit a scene together.

**Magic hour:** Early evening light that appears warm and rich on film with deep shadows.

**Marks:** Positions that are marked by a piece of tape on the floor to aid actors and camera to be in optimum position during the scene for focus and lighting.

**Scene:** A unit of action in one location in line with script.

**Set-up:** Position of camera in relation to action.

**Storyboard:** A series of drawings that visually break down the action of the scene.

**Take:** Each attempt to capture part of the scene on film, recorded by successive numbers on the clapperboard.

## THE CAMERA

**The gate:** The plate that applies pressure around the aperture forming a rectangular frame through which the light passes onto the film.

**Magazine:** The detachable compartment that is fitted onto the body of the camera and into which the film is loaded and unloaded.

**Matte box:** A box that is attached to front of camera and houses filters and mattes that may affect the way in which the image is registered onto the film.

**Motor:** Controls rotation of shutter and the movement of the film through the camera.

**Shutter:** Disk with a 180 degree cut-out which rotates to expose each frame passing the aperture to light.

**Viewfinder:** The opening through which the operator can see (through the eyepiece) the exact image that is being filmed.

## THE LENS

**Cinemascope:** A widescreen system produced by anamorphic compression – the use of supplementary lenses to expand the image width. Because it was used essentially with a 50 mm lens, depth of field was limited.

**Depth of field:** The area between the nearest and farthest point in front of the lens in which an actor or object can move and stay in focus. This is dependent on speed and focal length of the lens, setting of aperture and amount of light.

**Exposure:** The amount of light that passes through the lens and onto the film.

**F-stop/t-stop (stop):** The measurement that defines the exact opening of the lens diaphragm that determines how much light passes through the aperture.

**Flare:** Refracted light on the lens that shows up on the film as a bright spot of uneven light. This is avoided with the use of **flags** that limit excess or unwanted light falling onto the lens.

**Focal length:** Distance from the optical centre of the lens to the points behind the lens where the image is in sharp focus while the focus is set to infinity. Long focal lengths bring objects close, short focal length pushes subject away and gives a wider angle. The cinematographer's choice of lens is in accordance to its focal length for the desired perspective on the scene.

**Focus pull or pull focus:** A change in focus during the course of a shot.

**Prime:** Lens of a fixed focal length.

**Wide angle lens:** Lens with a short focal length whose vertical acceptance angle is more than 25 degrees.

**Zoom:** Lens with variable focal length.

## **CAMERA OPERATION TERMS**

**Aspect ratio:** The ratio between width and height of the frame.

**Big close-up:** A shot that shows detail in extreme close range. For example an actor's eyes or a small detail on an object.

**Close-up:** A shot that shows just the head of an actor or a detail of an object.

**Crane:** Large counterbalanced lever arm that is usually mounted on a wheeled carriage that allows camera to climb high above scene and descend towards it or vice-versa.

**Dolly:** A wheeled vehicle onto which the camera is mounted for tracking shots.

**Dutch tilt:** Shot in which the bottom and top of frame are at an angle to the horizontal lines in the image.

**Establishing shot:** Usually a wide shot. It is a shot at the opening of the scene which tells the viewer where the scene is taking place.

**Mid or medium close-up:** Shot that shows head and shoulders of the actor.

**Mid-shot:** Three-quarter length shot of actor or subject.

**Pan:** Camera movement on the horizontal axis.

**Tilt:** Camera movement on the vertical axis.

**Top shot:** An extreme high shot placing the camera directly above the scene.

**Track:** Movement towards or away from an object.

**Wide shot:** Shot that shows all elements of a scene or of a landscape.



## **FILM STOCK**

**ASA:** The sensitivity of the film to light.

**Emulsion:** The light-sensitive coating on the surface of the film negative.

**Exposure latitude:** The emulsion's ability to produce acceptable images over a range of exposures.

**Frame:** A single image on a strip of film. Also refers to the edges of an image.

**Negative:** Unexposed film stock.

**Speed:** The sensitivity of the film emulsion to light as defined by the ASA or EI rating.

## **FILTERS AND GELS**

**Diffusion filter:** Distributes light across the film and reduces image resolution to soften lines.

**Fog filter:** Distributes light from the light part of the image to the dark part to create a foggy effect over the picture.

**Graduated filter:** Filters with neutral density or colour on one part of the glass that graduates to clear glass.

**Low-contrast filter:** Reduces contrast of a scene.

**Matte:** An opaque mask that is placed in front of lens to black out a portion of the image. The obscured part is later filled with another image. For example the background may be matted out and then filled with another landscape element.

**Net:** Hairnet or stocking used as a diffuser.

**Neutral density filter:** Colourless filters that range in density and that are used to reduce the amount of light entering the lens when the intensity is too great for the film stock or for the required f-stop. Can be used as a filter in the camera or as a gel to fit over windows.

**Pola screen:** Polarises light and eliminates reflections in glass or glare from strong light sources. Can be used to deepen colours particularly the blue of the sky and highlight the white of clouds.

## LIGHTS

**Arc light:** High intensity light source produced by discharge of electricity between two electrodes.

**Available light:** Natural light with no artificial sources.

**Back light:** Light on a subject from behind.

**Bounce or reflected light:** Technique in which light is bounced off a reflective surface and back onto the subject. This produces a softer, less shadowy effect.

**Brutes:** A type of arc light that produces a high-intensity spot.

**Colour temperature:** Term that defines a light's colour quality in relation to the Kelvin scale.

**Contrast:** The difference in intensity between the light and dark parts of an image.

**Cross lighting:** Lighting that is sourced from the side of a scene.

**Eye light:** A small light that is used to pick out the actor's eyes.

**Fill light or fill:** Secondary lighting that illuminates the detail in shadow areas of the image and reduces overall contrast.

**Flag:** Used to prevent unwanted light from reaching the lens.

**Gel:** A transparent filter placed in front of a light. Different coloured gels correct colour for daylight or tungsten. They may also be used to provide different colour light for effects.

**High key lighting:** Lighting that gives an overall brightness to the image.

**HMI:** Daylight coloured lights

**Inky-dinks:** Small, incandescent lights.

**Key light:** The main light source on a scene.

**Kicker:** Similar to a back light but placed in three-quarter back position and at a lower angle.

**Low key lighting:** Used where the scene is usually only lit with one source and the image is only partially illuminated.

**Practicals:** Ordinary lights on the film set that are switched on or off during a shot.

**Reflector:** Light reflective surfaces that are used to bounce or reflect light back onto a subject or scene.

**Rim-light:** Used to separate subject from the background with a back light that creates a halo-type effect around the subject.

**Scrim:** Fabric that is placed over light to reduce intensity.

**Soft light:** Open reflector lights that produce a soft light with no shadows.

**Source light:** Light that is intended to come from a particular source in the scene. For example, a window or lamp.

**Space lights:** Used when a substantial amount of light is needed over a large area. Made up of a number of lights rigged at intervals to provide fill light over the scene.

## LABORATORY AND PROCESSING

**Answer print:** First complete print of a film delivered by laboratory.

**Flashing:** A process in which the negative is exposed to light before shooting. This reduces the contrast of the stock and desaturates the image.

**Grading:** The process when the printer light intensity and colour filters are selected to optimise the density and colour of the original footage. **Light tests** may be carried out to determine the optimum intensity for the final print.

**Rushes/dailies:** First prints of the exposed negative which are processed overnight and delivered for viewing by the crew.

**Saturation:** A colour when it is reproduced in its purest and most vivid state.

## Clips

	Film Title and Page Reference	Film Time
1	<i>Allá en el Rancho Grande</i> Cruz's song pp. 109-112	02.04.42 - 2.08.21
2	<i>Allá en el Rancho Grande</i> Theme song pp. 115-116 Huapango con constestación pp. 116-118	03.06.51 - 3.15.05
3	<i>Río Escondido</i> Rosaura crosses salt plain pp. 138-140	00.07.12 - 00.09.24
4.	<i>Animas Trujano</i> Animas Trujano and <i>hacendado</i> pp. 151	00.32.20 - 00.33.39
5.	<i>Animas Trujano</i> The grandson is sold pp. 152-153	1.13.31 - 1.18.08
6	<i>Salón México</i> Mercedes and Paco <i>danzón</i> p.175	0.04.26 - 0.06.36
7	<i>Salón México</i> Dancing in Salón México p. 175	0.07.55 - 0.09.40
8	<i>Salón México</i> The school and headmistress pp. 177	0.15.42 - 0.18.36
9	<i>Días de otoño</i> Luisa and Rita pp.180-181	0.06.43 - 0.07.57
10	<i>Días de otoño</i> Luisa and mirror pp. 182	0.46.29 - 0.48.00
11	<i>Días de otoño</i> Luisa in <i>azotea</i> room p.182	0.57.49 - 0.58.39
12	<i>Los olvidados</i> Cutler's shop pp. 201-202	0.42.22 - 0.44.22
13	<i>El ángel exterminador</i> The toast p.207	0.06.00 - 0.08.14
14	<i>El ángel exterminador</i> The music room thunder storm p.209	0.32.10 - 0.32.59
15.	<i>El ángel exterminador</i> The music room pp. 209-210	0.39.37 - 0. 42.43

- |    |   |                   |
|----|---|-------------------|
| 16 | <i>Él</i><br>The bell tower p. 212          | 0.57.30 - 0.59.28 |
| 17 | <i>Él</i><br>Francisco on the stairs p. 212 | 1.05.32 - 1.06.37 |

